LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE

PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

BY

HESCHEL GREENBERG

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE

ESSAYS ON PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

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Rabbi Heschel Greenberg

212 Exeter Road

Williamsville, NY 14221

716-632-0467

716-245-9520

rabbigreenberg@yahoo.com

Dedicated to the Lubavitcher Rebbe, who, more than any Jewish leader, has prepared us for Moshiach and the imminent Redemption

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B"H

INTRODUCTION

The following collection of essays on *parshas Bereishis* was taken from the weekly Torah messages that I have been sending to hundreds of individuals over the past 22 years.

These messages were written in the spirit of the talks of the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Several of them are actually based on or adaptations of his essays and discourses on the parsha.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe declared that we are living in unique times. He applied the words of the Midrash to our day:

> "The time of your Redemption has arrived."

The Rebbe stated further that the straightforward way for us to bring about the actual Redemption is by learning what the Torah says about Moshiach and Redemption. While learning Torah in general has the capacity to change our mindset, learning

about Moshiach and Redemption has the capacity to alter of exile-constrained way of thinking and cultivating a liberating manner of thinking.

In this spirit, each one of these messages concludes with an application of the Torah lesson of that week to our understanding of Moshiach and Redemption, as well as to help us prepare for the coming of Moshiach and the imminent Redemption.

It is my fervent hope that these essays will contribute to the process of changing our *galus*/exile mindset into a Moshiach mindset, which is effected by the study of these themes in Torah.. And may this effort contribute to the imminent Redemption through our righteous Moshiach. Amen.

The double parsha Tazria-Mezora is connected to Moshiach whom the Talmud identifies as a Metzora, one who is ailing from tzara'as. Many of the essays in this book discuss the relationship between Moshiach and tzara'as in several different ways.

ESSAY ONE

ANIMALS BEFORE HUMANS?

One of Judaism's paradoxes is to be happy with every bit of progress yet never be satisfied with even colossal achievements.

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ESSAY ONE

ANIMALS BEFORE HUMANS?

Order Counts

Sequence in the Torah is not only important but it assists us in gleaning the Torah's message and instruction with greater integrity. Not only is it important for us to know what the Torah says in any given parsha, chapter or verse; it is also important for us to know what lessons we can derive from the juxtaposition of these sections of the Torah and the order in which they are presented.

The importance of order is underscored by our Sages in their commentary on this week's parsha. In the preceding parsha of Shemini, the Torah elaborated on the subject of animals that are ritually pure and those that are not.

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This week's double-parsha, Tazria and Metzora, begins with the laws concerning the state of ritual purity with respect to a human being.

Our Sages make careful note of this sequence and ask why the Torah addresses the laws concerning the purity of animals before the laws concerning the purity of humans? They answer that this parallels the order in which G-d first introduced animals and humans. First He created the animals and then He created Adam and Eve.

Although our Sages answered the question by citing the order of creation, it merely gives rise to another question, so why did G-d first create the animals and then humans?

Paradoxical Answers

This question was discussed by our Talmudic Sages and they give two paradoxical answers:

The first is to impress upon us that we are inferior to all other creatures. When we are inclined to become haughty, we are reminded that even the gnats preceded us. The second

answer is that, to the contrary, G-d wanted us to have the entire world completed so that we would be able to enter onto the scene with the banquet fully prepared.

Let us now see if either of these two approaches can also adequately explain why the order of the laws of purity also favor the animals.

It would seem that the sequence of the creation of animals and humans can convey either our lowliness or our importance, for indeed, both are true. But prefacing the laws concerning humans with the laws concerning animals does not suggest the inferiority or superiority of either, because both sets of laws pertain to people; the first set governs our interaction with the beasts, the second with ourselves. There are no laws directed solely towards animals!

We have to clarify why humans were considered inferior to a gnat. At the time of our creation we were without sin. Why then should we regard ourselves as inferior to animals?

The following examination is based in part on the Rebbe's observation (Likkutei Sichos, volume 7, p. 74*ff*) that it is the mere fact that a human has the potential to sin that renders him inferior.

However, this too needs clarification. Why should the mere **potential** to sin render us inferior? And, what about true tzadikim, who do not transgress? Why should they be lumped together with sinners and be relegated to an inferior position *vis-a-vis* animals?

Animals and Humans

The answer may lie in our understanding a fundamental difference between humans and animals. Simply put, animals lack very little. Their few needs are basic and their desires do not go beyond their needs. As we surely know, humans have many, many needs. They have physical needs, emotional needs and spiritual needs. And within each of these need categories they have multifarious and diversified subsidiary needs. And our neediness doesn't stop there. Humans also

want things that are well beyond their needs. And then, when we procure the things we want, they often become our "needs" to the point that we feel we can't live without them.

To illustrate this point we find, tragically, when many people are told they must give up certain enjoyable activities due to age or illness, they lose the desire to live. Their desires have become so much a part of their existence that they cannot countenance losing the ability to satisfy them. They are the victims of "wants" which have morphed into fundamental "needs."

Moreover, our Sages tell us that "one who has 100 wants 200 and one who has 200 wants 400." With age, our desires-become-needs grow exponentially. To be human is to be a fundamentally incomplete and inherently flawed creature.

Why did G-d hardwire us to never be satisfied?

The truth is that being human demands of us that we are never to be fully satisfied since our G-dly soul has an insatiable thirst for G-dliness. G-d is infinite and therefore a person

whose G-dly soul is dominant cannot, by definition, feel contented. The tzadik, dominated by his G-dly soul, wants to get closer to G-d; he wants to study more Torah and perform more Mitzvos and can never get enough. However, even the least G-dly of individuals frequently may be obsessed by desires because their G-dly souls are sending subliminal messages to want MORE. Unfortunately, their Animal souls receive only one side of the message and translate that craving into the desire for more and more elusive animalistic pleasure.

Tzadik or no tzadik, being human means never being whole; we can never fully satisfy our desires and we will always remain sensitive to that which we are missing.

The Pencil or the Computer

This may explain why our ability to sin renders us inferior to animals, even the most righteous of us. The most common Hebrew word for sin is *chet*, which really means "deficient" or "missing the mark." It may be suggested that the significance of our ability

to sin, marking us as inferior to animals, is that sin comes from pursuing a life in which our desires render us perennially unsatisfied. We are essentially flawed creatures even before we sin. From our first breath we want **more**. And the more we get, the more we want. The elemental difference between the righteous and others is only the object of their desires.

We can now understand why we were created after all the other creatures. It is not our sins themselves that make us inferior. It is that our potential for sin, for exhibiting moral and spiritual deficiency, is rooted in our unique status as creatures who can never be complete. Even the tzadik exhibits this incompleteness, albeit for the laudable reason that his insatiable desire is to get close to the Divine.

From the standpoint of a static and whole creation we are inferior. We can understand this by way of an analogy. A person interested in buying a writing implement is given a choice: he can either get a low tech device like a pencil, that will reliably function the same way every time, or, instead, a state

of the art word-processing computer that will always need upgrading. While the latter choice is much more advanced and sophisticated (as well as gratifying) it is nonetheless "inferior" in one important respect. It can never be complete; it will always need to be upgraded because it is a complex machine with complex functionality, whereas the pencil will always be useful the way it is (as long as you remember to sharpen it from time to time).

The human being's strength as a complex being is also his weakness; conversely, his weakness, i.e., his never ending desire, is the source of his strength. We must always update ourselves by unceasing growth in the right direction. Others can't hack your pencil but they surely can hack your computer unless you keep it up to date.

We can now understand that the apparently negative reason for creating humans last is actually a tribute to our singularity and transcendence over all creation. The fact that even the lowliest creature preceded us due to our being perennially incomplete is also, ironically, our strength. Coming onto the

scene after all others is precisely that which set us apart from and places us above and beyond all of creation. We are incomplete only because our goal is Divine infinity; all the rest of creation is constrained and fashioned from a finite mold.

Easier to Elevate the Animal

We can now understand why the Torah places the laws concerning the purity of animals before the laws governing the purity of humans.

When a person deals with an animal, he or she is interested in elevating the animal. That is not so difficult a task because the kosher animal poses no resistance; it is a relatively complete creature. It just needs a "little nudge" to take it from one realm to the next. However, when a human being wants to rise to the next level, it is an interminable and demanding process; there is no respite or hiatus. It is no coincidence that the first example of human ritual purity in parsha Tazria relates to birth, an eternal cycle that symbolizes the never ending journey of all

human beings. This is followed by the command of circumcision on the eighth day; the day that symbolizes going beyond the cycle of nature.

Two Phases of Existence

The two phases represented by the purity of animals and human purity in the birth process reflect the two periods of human existence. Prior to the Messianic Redemption, we are stuck in the animal model. We can only deal with finite achievements and the animal or natural aspects of existence. In Chassidic parlance, it is said that we can presently only refine the emotional energies within this world; emotions are symbolized by animals. In the final stage of history, we will graduate into a world in which we can elevate the human being, who is already head and shoulders above creation, up to an even higher realm. In Chassidic literature this alludes to the refinement and elevation of the Divine intellectual energies now concealed within creation.

Our means of preparing for this new age and its focus on the infinite is Torah study, particularly the parts of Torah that focus on the Divine; i.e., the overtly spiritual and G-dly teachings of Chassidus. And most significantly, the aspects of Torah which relate to the future age of Redemption, when we will bask in the Divine infinity.

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ESSAY TWO

FAMILY PLANNING

The periods of life in which we feel uncertainty and lack of clarity are the lulls that allow us to introspect and gather energy for the next direction in life.

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ESSAY TWO

FAMILY PLANNING

The Miracle of Birth, But...

Childbirth — the opening subject of this week's parsha — is universally acclaimed as one of the most — if not the most — glorious event in nature. The miracle of life is arguably greater than any other miracle

When the birth of a child occurs, the Torah tells us that the mother goes through a period of *tumah*. This Hebrew word is truly untranslatable. The standard translations such as "unclean," "impure," defiled" etc. are far from accurate representations of this term. Why would a woman going through the most spiritually uplifting period of her life, by bringing a Divine soul into the world, be regarded as unclean? We can attempt to clarify the term in the context of Torah concepts.

Clarity

Perhaps the key to gaining some glimpse into this period that follows birth, we should refer to the flip side of the term *tumah* which is *taharah. Tahara* is etymologically related to the concept of clarity, where matters are clear and defined. (We can now see why the term is also used for purity or cleanliness, because they are related to clarity.)

The word, *tumah*, conversely, connotes a state of existence where there is a lack of clarity necessitating a period of withdrawal and reflection, to bring clarity into the situation.

When a woman carries a child in her womb, there is a sense of clarity as to what her role is. She is the carrier of a human being, who will bring a new light into the world. Her whole life revolves around her unborn child.

Once the child is born, there is a period where a woman naturally feels a sense of loss, even as she rejoices over her newly born child. It is a period when her recuperation from the travail of childbirth does not allow her to fully "enjoy" the fruit of her labor.

Similarly, her relationship with her husband will be somewhat altered, because of her physical condition and her new status as a mother.

This lack of clarity and direction parallels a spiritual lull. As long as she was carrying the child she was accessing twice as much spiritual energy than she would normally. From conception to childbirth, the woman is engaged in the most spiritually sublime activity.

The Lull

No sooner that the birth process is over and the mother reaches the climax of spiritual experience, she "loses" that extra measure of spirituality needed for the development and birth of the child. Now she must draw back into her own reserves, so to speak, and find the energy, stamina (both physical and spiritual) to raise the child and resume family life.

This period, thus, represents a lull in between two different stages of a woman's development. Ironically, during pregnancy,

she received outside assistance for her internal role. After birth, she needs to find internal inspiration to deal with that which is now external to her.

The physical period of healing, with its lack of clarity, coupled with the loss of intense spiritual energy that accompanied her pregnancy and birth, compels here to become introspective and somewhat detached from her husband and the outside world.

This is the state of *tumah*. It is not a negative period, any more than sleep is negative. On the contrary, sleep is when the body and soul are rejuvenated. The soul ascends to higher spiritual dimensions and absorbs new reservoirs of G-dly energy to allow for a heightened sensitivity the next morning.

Yet, sleep in its own way produces an effect for which our sages also employed the term "*tumah*." It is a time of transition from one day to the next, from one spiritual challenge to the next. By definition, transition, although positive and necessary, is a time of uncertainty and lack of clarity. Indeed, the transitional period is designed to help the

person gain this clarity. But, without sleep and other forms of "lulls" in one's life, there can be no ensuing state of *tahara*, clarity and focus.

Giving Birth Every Day!

In the Messianic Age, however, our sages tell us that a woman will give birth every day!

One interpretation of this is that there will no longer be a need for the lull in order to grow to the next level. Each level of holiness, in and of itself, will be a stepping stone to reach the next level without the need to experience periods of withdrawal.

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ESSAY THREE

DO NOT FEAR!

Punishment is never meted out to take revenge.

Punishment is ultimately for the good of society and for the good of the sinner because it helps to rehabilitate and procure atonement for the sinner.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

ESSAY THREE

DO NOT FEAR!

For the Nations

The laws of *tzara'as* (skin lesions also referred to as *nega'im*) are introduced by the Torah with the words: "If a man has on the skin of his body a blotch, a creamy blotch or a bright spot and it forms a lesion of *tzara'as* on the skin of his body, he should be brought to Aaron the priest, or to one of his sons, the priests." The Torah then describes a purification process for the person so afflicted.

The Midrash comments that when the Jewish people heard the section covering *nega'im* they were afraid. To allay their fears Moses said "These are for the nations of the world, but you should eat, drink and be happy." And so does it say (Psalms 32:10), "Many are the pains of the wicked, and he who trusts in G-d—kindness surrounds him."

(It should be noted that in this Midrashic citation the nations of the world are compared to the wicked because throughout history the overwhelming majority of nations did not adhere to the Seven Noahide Commandments, which were given to all of humanity. Moreover, these nations persistently persecuted and oppressed the Jewish people.

There are, however, always exceptions to the rule. These individuals are appropriately labeled by our Talmudic Sages as "the pious of the nations of the world," and are promised a share in the World to Come. These righteous gentiles clearly are not identified with the wicked.

This is particularly true in these Messianic times as we approach the time when all nations will become refined and "serve G-d with one consent" as the prophet Zephaniah predicted. Many nations are filled with hatred toward the Jewish people and the Land of Israel and have not yet embraced observance of the Seven Noahide Commandments. Even so, there are a growing number of individuals

who have and can be included in the category of "the pious of the nations of the world.")

From this Midrashic source it would seem that these skin lesions only occurred to the nations of the world and not to the Jewish people. Yet this is rather strange since the Mishnah clearly states the very opposite. The laws of *Nega'im* apply only to the Jewish people exclusively!

How can we reconcile these two diametrically opposed views?

One can ask another question, why did the Jews express fear only when they heard the laws of *nega'im*? Why didn't they express fear when they heard of other areas of impurity such as the *zav* or *zavah,* which are signs of illness? Furthermore, the citation from Psalms implies that they were concerned with the pain associated with *tzara'as.* However, nowhere is it said that these lesions were painful. And even if they were, it still is hard to understand mention of these lesions would elicit so much fear.

A third question can be raised. Why does Moses tell the Jewish people to eat, drink and

be happy? How does that address their fear? Moses could have simply told them there is no reason to fear.

Sign of Righteousness

One way of answering this question is based on the understanding, discussed in Chassidic literature, that *nega'im* happens specifically to righteous people. The more righteous and spiritually sensitive a person is, the more likely that the slightest deviation from the highest path of righteousness will cause a blemish to materialize on the skin. It can be likened to a stain that will ruin silk clothing as compared to the effect of the same stain on a coarser material, such as sackcloth.

If so, one may reason, how can we ever indulge in eating and drinking? When we study Torah or perform a Mitzvah we are protected. But when we eat and drink, even the most scrupulous of individuals may be allowing their animal nature to prevail. That can understandably lead to *tzara'as.* Even if we can keep our intentions and thoughts pure and noble when we eat and drink how

can we ever be happy if even the slightest slip or spill can taint or contaminate us. We will be terrified at the prospect that we are standing at the precipice and are likely to fall at any moment.

Until the Jews learned the laws of *tzara'as* they imagined that good people have nothing to fear. As long as we follow the commandments, they believed, we are safe. But when the laws of *tzara'as* were revealed they discovered to their consternation that even the most righteous people can break out into *tzara'as*. They therefore wondered how anyone could feel comfortable being a righteous Jew.

No Pain: Surrounded with Kindness

To allay the fear brought on by the prospects of *tzara'as*, Moses tell the Jewish people that they may eat, drink and be happy. As long as they have trust in G-d, the pain associated with *tzara'as* will not affect them.

Moses did not say they will not be afflicted with *tzara'as*. Rather he said that they will not feel the pain because they will be

surrounded with G-d's kindness. The righteous will recognize that their *tzara'as* was not intended to be painful. Rather when it occurs it is a sign of G-d's kindness to let them know that they have a slight imperfection, which, when corrected, will bring them to a state of perfection.

This can explain why it says "they are **surrounded** with kindness." The term "surrounded" implies that it is on the periphery, for indeed *tzara'as* is only skin deep. The reason it is on the skin exclusively and not deeper is because the righteous individual cannot internalize even the slightest trace of evil and impurity. Whatever impurity there is it shows up only on the surface.

Many Pains: Many Levels of Punishment

We still have to explain why Moses said that *tzara'as* is reserved for the nations of the world. As stated, that is clearly contradicted by the law that it only applies to the Jewish people.

We may answer this question by referring to the concept of punishment in general. While the laws of *nega'im* apply to the Jewish people exclusively, punishment as a source of fear is indeed reserved for the wicked among the nations of the world.

This may be the deeper meaning of the worlds of the Psalm, "**Many** are the pains of the wicked." The term "many" in this verse may refer not only to the various forms of pain, but also to the many reasons the wicked are afflicted with pain:

They may be suffering because G-d wants to deter them and others from sinning. The pain might be intended for rehabilitation of the sinner. A third benefit that the suffering of the wicked achieves is that it brings atonement that cleanses their transgression. Alternatively, punishment is intended to make it impossible for the sinner to continue to sin. And, in the most of extreme cases of evil, its purpose might be to rid the world of these wicked individuals and prevent them from giving off their spiritually noxious fumes.

Now in truth, all forms of punishment which derive from a benevolent G-d are, in essence, extensions of G-d's kindness because they get rid of evil. Overtly, however, there is only the pain. The kindness is concealed.

It is these manifold forms of pain and punishment ("**Many** are the pains of the wicked") which elicit fear.

Kind Pain

Nega'im, however, cannot be lumped together with the other forms of punishment. As stated above, the skin lesion was actually a sign of the person's inner perfection. It pointed to that individual's extreme level of sensitivity to even the slightest hint of imperfection. That is why the two people we read in the Torah as having been afflicted with *tzara'as* were Moses and Miriam, two of the most righteous people to have ever lived. Their *tzara'as* was a sign that they were super sensitive to even the most superficial and external negative influences. When these righteous individuals were afflicted with *tzara'as* it was demonstrably clear that they

were surrounded by G-d's kindness. They were informed that all they had to do to reach perfection was to get rid of the most peripheral form of impurity. Instead of instilling them with fear Moses and Miriam realized that they were only one small step away from spiritual perfection. This realization actually generated feelings of ecstasy rather than fear.

The Talmud describes Moshiach as another one who is afflicted with *tzara'as*. The Rebbe (*Likkutei Sichos* Volume 37) explains this as a reflection of the status of the Jewish people at the time Moshiach comes to redeem them. Over the course of our long exile we have, as a collective entity, refined all that needs to be refined. Only the most external and superficial aspects of our identity need to be "polished." Moshiach's task, the very last accomplishment necessary for the final Redemption, is to complete the refinement process dealing with these most external manifestations of impurity.

"Do Not Fear: The Time of Your Redemption has Arrived"

We can now see a parallel between the Midrash's suggestion that we need not fear *tzara'as* (unlike the wicked of the nations) with another Midrash concerning Moshiach's announcement to the Jewish people (in light of the fear they experienced in the face of tumultuous world events leading up to the Messianic Age): "Humble Ones, **do not fear**, the time of your Redemption has arrived."

This troubling fear may result from the erroneous perception that we still have far to go to be worthy of the Redemption and we therefore must endure even more travail, G-d forbid. To allay this fear, Moshiach echoes Moses' words of comfort, and declares, "the time of your Redemptio0n has arrived." This can be said to parallel the statement that we need not fear from *tzara'as*. The reason is that *tzara'as* indicates that we have essentially "clinched the deal" and what is left is for Moshiach to make the finishing touches to get us over the doorstep into Geulah. We can therefore eat, drink and be happy, confident in the knowledge that we are about to dance

into the *Geulah Shleimah*-Complete Redemption with Moshiach at our head!

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ESSAY FOUR

ONLY SKIN DEEP

Just like the body breaks out in hives or a rash when it cannot tolerate certain substances, so too the soul will have an allergic reaction to evil.

Don't suppress that feeling; excise the irritant!

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

ESSAY FOUR

ONLY SKIN DEEP

Confused Translation

One of the most enigmatic phenomena recorded in the Torah – in this week's parsha – was the occurrence of a skin disorder called Tzara'as, that has been mistranslated as leprosy.

When the signs of this "disease' appeared it required "quarantining" the one afflicted. It is easy to see why Biblical translators have confused this skin disorder that requires isolation with leprosy.

In truth, this skin disorder was not contagious and would often disappear after a week or two. The quarantining of the person afflicted with Tzara'as, our sages tell us, was not to prevent the spread of a contagious disease, but rather to serve as a punishment for one who spoke ill of another, causing

strife and separation between people. Isolation, then, was a taste of his own "medicine."

Only for the Righteous

Despite the fact that this "punishment" was for speaking ill of another, it was rare that anyone would receive this supernatural disease. In fact, the sages tell us that Tzara'as no longer exists. But why would this be? Certainly (and regretfully) negative speech still exists in our society - so why no more Tzara'as?

Kabbalah and Chassidic thought teach that Tzara'as only afflicted people who had refined their inner personalities and character. These people are virtually perfect, the only imperfection they might have is a slight external one. Note for example two of the prime recipients of this disease in the Torah: Moses and Miriam. Both of them were perfectly righteous, their only slight retreat from the highest standards of holiness was a use of speech – for people on their high level – could possibly be translated as improper.

In other words, Tzara'as afflicted those whose inner dynamics were pure and their imperfections were only skin deep. Their entire being deep down to their very core – aside from the skin – was pure and holy.

Allergic Reaction to Evil

Translated into more contemporary terms, Tzara'as can be viewed as an "allergic" response to even the most subtle forms of evil. When an imperfect individual says something wrong, his/her body and soul can tolerate it and internalize it. When a more refined person, however, says the same thing, his/her soul and body cannot tolerate it and the evil is "sent to the surface" where it will get incorporated the least and do the least damage.

The lesson for us is that we must sensitize ourselves to even the most subtle forms of unholiness. We should aspire to reach a level where our body and soul work so harmoniously, that when the soul senses a "foreign" substance, even he body exhibits signs of rejecting it.

Tzara'as represents the final stage of spiritual refinement in the life of a Tzadik, who is working on eradicating the last remnants of evil from within.

For this reason the Talmud (Sanhedrin 98b) identifies the Messiah as one afflicted with Tzara'as. Moshiach will bring about the final stage of spiritual refinement for the Jewish people and the entire world.

We are All Metzora; in a Good Way!

The Rebbe explained that through the thousands of years of our cumulative efforts of Torah and Mitzvot, we have succeeded in bringing about the refinement of the Jewish people and the entire world. The more good that is accomplished, the more the evil is removed from our midst and pushed to the surface.

This may explain why, notwithstanding the gradual purification of the world, there is still much (more) evil apparent on the surface.

The ultimate stage in this process of refinement – that occurs in the Messianic Era

– is for the world to become so sensitized to evil that any appearance of evil – even if it is only on the surface – is regarded by the world as a foreign substance and is immediately expunged.

As we stand on the very threshold of the Redemption, we should strive for this degree of sensitivity. Our goal is to so refine our character that even the "innocuous" gossip about another should be so foreign to our constitutions that we naturally and instinctively reject it. Conversely, our sensitivity should inspire us to readily see the needs of others and react to them.

This approach is called living a Moshiach and Redemption oriented way of life, which prepares us for and hastens the final Redemption.

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ESSAY FIVE

INSIDE OUT AND OUTSIDE IN

In Chassidic tradition we always look beneath the surface of others to discover their hidden good.

However, we must also appreciate the surface and superficial good others possess and praise them for it.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

ESSAY FIVE

INSIDE OUT AND OUTSIDE IN

Tzara'as is Not Leprosy

The word "leprosy" is usually the way translators incorrectly render the Hebrew word, Tzara'as that appears in this week's parsha. The basis for this error is the fact that this ailment afflicts the skin, and that the Torah required quarantining for the one so afflicted.

One proof that the Torah is not referring to leprosy is that the same term is used for clothing and buildings. Obviously, the Torah speaks not of an illness per se, but of the deterioration of the color of a person, garment or house. Furthermore, this ailment, as opposed to leprosy was curable and not contagious.

Discoloring of Another

Tzara'as as a discoloration of the skin, according to our Sages, resulted from a person speaking ill of others, known in Hebrew as Lashon Hara. In Judaism punishments meted out by G-d are usually "measure for measure." Hence, the fact that the "punishment" was the discoloration of the skin was an indication that the sin of lashon hara is associated with the skin.

On the basic level, when one slanders others, he or she is essentially "discoloring" them. And while all the insults in the world cannot alter one's inner color and beauty, it does have the capacity to remove the sheen and integrity of the outer person.

Two Forms of Slander

Upon deeper reflection, slander comes in two opposite forms, both of which relate to the surface of the person:

There is the case where the slanderer focuses on a superficial defect that another might have. In doing so, one is guilty of ignoring the

positive qualities that that individual possesses and which overshadow the mild external flaw. Moreover, Jewish mystical texts teach us, undue emphasis of an external fault can ultimately cause the fault to become engrained and internalized.

By focusing on that deficiency, the slanderer has demonstrated how he cares only about the surface (i.e. the skin) of the other. Hence his punishment was Tzara'as, that affected only the skin; measure for measure.

There is, however, another reverse form of lashon hara, where the slanderer exposes some actual flaw in the other that may have been embedded in his or her soul, hidden from view. By speaking ill of another, one can actually cause that latent flaw to become an actual and manifest one. In this scenario, lashon hara can cause one's internal negativity to come to the surface, to show up on the skin, so to speak. Here too, the punishment is the discoloration of the skin because the sin was bringing the hidden into the open.

The difference between the two scenarios is whether the evil starts at the surface and works its way inward, or the evil comes from within and works its way out to the surface.

(The sin of speaking baseless evil of another is technically a separate transgression not to be confused with lashon hara which deals with true gossip.)

Actually, the word Metzora (the term used by the Torah to describe the person who is afflicted with Tzara'as) is a composite of two words: Motzei ra (one who finds evil), or Motzi ra (one who extracts evil). It may be suggested that the phrase "one who finds" evil refers to the person who casually notices another's faults and speaks about them, while the phrase "one who extracts" evil refers to the one who digs deep into a person's psyche, heart and soul to find some hidden flaw.

It may also be suggested that the difference between these two forms of lashon hara determined the length of one's affliction and recovery. If one merely focused on another's superficial flaws, but did not dig deeper into the inner dynamics of the other's soul to find

fault, then the corresponding affliction of Tzara'as would likewise be of a fleeting nature.

However, if the slanderer invaded the other's being by probing beneath the surface to find some deeply rooted flaws and then exposed them, the corresponding outbreak of Tzara'as likewise affected the person internally to the point that it was exposed outwardly as well. This was a far more serious situation because the diseased skin was an expression of a seriously diseased inside.

The lesson from the above analysis is that either way it is harmful to speak ill of another's internal or external flaws, (unless, of course, it is to protect an innocent person from harm, and the like, as discussed in Jewish law.)

Two Forms of Positive Speech

There are also two corresponding ways of speaking lashon tov, or positive words about another:

When one sees a person whose outer appearance does not warrant praise, one must probe beneath the surface to find the inner good. The Ba'al Shem Tov, the founder of the Chassidic movement once compared the Jew to the earth that contains hidden treasures.

Conversely, one must also make an effort to see the superficial qualities of another. And even when it seems that these qualities lack real substance, nevertheless, when one focuses on the positive aspects of a person's behavior, it helps to reinforce them, to the point where they become internalized.

The Metzora Metaphor for Moshiach

The Talmud, when discussing the identity of the Moshiach, refers to him as a person who is afflicted with Tzara'as. Commentators grapple with this rather odd characterization of the Messiah and conclude that it is obviously a metaphor.

In light of the above discussion, we can appreciate the Metzora metaphor. Moshiach's role requires that he direct his energies to

both the internal and external nature of the people whom he will liberate from exile.

Exile, is not just a geographic state of existence, whereby the Jewish people were driven out of their homeland and Holy Land. Exile is also a condition which prevents us from being in touch with the Holy Land aspects of our own souls and the Holy Land of the souls of others.

For Moshiach—and all of us—to change the dynamics of exile, he/we must be capable of doing two opposite things:

First, he/we must go beyond the surface of each and every person and see his or her inner beauty and holiness. By doing so, Moshiach/we will help to reveal and actualize their positive qualities.

Second, Moshiach/we must also dwell on the external qualities of others, and work on cultivating and exercising those positive attributes, although they are presently only skin deep. By promoting greater observance, repeated performances of the Mitzvot, which are external acts, the surface holiness begins to seep through the "pores in the skin" and

becomes an integral part of the previously superficial Jew. This is what brings about individual as well as the collective Redemption of the Jewish people and of the entire world.

ESSAY SIX

NEGA-TIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Relationships are challenging.

Everyone needs a mentor who is imbued with sensitivity and humility to help us navigate the pathways of our relationships with G-d and other people.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

ESSAY SIX

NEGA-TIVE RELATIONSHIPS

Fiery Passion, Bonding and Clarity.

This week's Torah reading discusses the unusual skin condition called *tzara'as* (incorrectly translated as leprosy) or *nega* (Is this where the word negative originated?)

The Torah introduces this subject in the following manner:

> "If a man has on the skin of his body: *s'eis*-a white blotch, *sapachas*-a creamy blotch, or *baheres*-a bright spot, and it forms a lesion of *Tzara'as* on the skin of his body, he should be brought to Aaron the priest, or to one of his sons, the priests (for examination)."

The Chassidic classic *Ma'or Vashemesh* interprets this verse in quite a novel way. The following is based on his commentary:

The abovementioned three types of *Tzara'as: s'eis, sapachas* and *baheres* can also be translated as: fiery passion, bonding and clarity.

What can possibly be wrong with someone who has fiery passion for G-d? Why is bonding with G-d and having clarity about one's relationship with G-d associated with a dreaded skin disease that renders the person spiritually defiled and requires of him to be isolated?

Ego Driven Spirituality

The answer lies in the difference between ego driven spirituality and G-d inspired spirituality. Passion can be all about oneself. One can be in love with someone else because they are in love with themselves. Even love for G-d when misplaced can turn into a negative force because it may only serve to enhance one's own ego. Indeed, the word *se'is* can also be rendered as "raised," because the person who exhibits intense passion for G-d may actually be engaged in an ego trip.

In addition to the problem with ego that may be at the root of one's passion, the passion itself may not endure. When passion for spirituality is driven by obsession with self, it can abruptly change course. The passion can be directed to other matters that are rather ungodly.

Selfish Love of the Other

Similarly, the idea of bonding and connecting with G-d—a positive thing—can also turn **nega**tive.

Whenever a relationship between two people is discussed, both parties must first define the relationship in terms of what the **other** party wants. In a marriage each partner must ask the other what are the other partner's terms for the relationship.

If the relationship and bond between them is defined by what each partner desires for himself or herself, that bond will not be a genuine one, which may explain why so many marriages fail.

Smugness in a Relationship

And the same can be said for the idea of clarity. While clarity is certainly preferable to doubt, confusion and chaos, it is not necessarily guaranteed to be a positive experience.

Frequently, we can be so smug and certain of the status of our relationship that we never pause to examine what we have not done right. We cannot imagine that our relationship is falling apart because we are living a delusional existence. This, too, is a product of a relationship that is ego driven; one is blind to the other side's assessment of the relationship.

How do we know if we are a victim of this misdirected spiritual malady of "*nega*-itis?

Mentor's Resume

The answer lies in the verse cited at the beginning of this essay:

> "...he should be brought to Aaron the priest, or to one of his sons, the priests (for examination)."

We must have a spiritual mentor who can judge our motives and determine if our passion is G-d inspired or ego driven.

However, the person with whom one must consult must conform to three conditions that were present in Aaron.

To be a good mentor one must be totally objective. If one has any vested interests in telling or not telling a person the truth about their condition, he or she cannot offer good advice.

Aaron personified the highest level of spiritual attainment enabling him to rise above the petty interests that derive from one's materialistic nature. Aaron, as his brother Moses, was also known for humility. Aaron thus possessed true objectivity. One must seek an Aaron-like personality who is head and shoulders above the rest of the community, and who is humble and accessible as any other member of the community.

Aaron was also a High Priest, whose role it was to kindle the lights of the Menorah in the Temple. The seven branches of the

Menorah are representative of seven soul-archetypes. Aaron's role was to ignite the flames and passion of each and every Jew just as his own soul was on fire. Aaron thus symbolized the highest form of passion. Only one who appreciates the virtue of passion can be the judge as to whether the passion is good or bad.

Third, Aaron was known for his selfless love and concern for all. Aaron is described in Ethics of the Fathers as a person who advocated: "love peace, pursue peace, love all creatures and bring them close to the Torah." Hence Aaron was a fitting person to help us sort out our spiritual life.

In short, a mentor must be beyond petty interests, be passionate and caring in the mold of Aaron and all the great Jewish leaders of the past.

Moshiach Clarity

According to the teachings of our Sages, Moshiach will be the greatest leader of all, even surpassing the level of Moses and Aaron in many respects.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

Our generation has experienced the greatest crises in relationships. And it is our generation that therefore needs Moshiach to help us sort them out. Moshiach will be the most qualified person to mentor the entire Jewish people; instilling within them selfless passion for G-d and others, enabling them to form genuine bonds and ensuring that they enjoy true clarity. Indeed, the prophet Daniel describes the Messianic Age as an age when everything will be fully clarified.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

ESSAY SEVEN

THE REAL YOU

Counter intuitively, the state of the Jewish nation is good and strong.

We are ready for Moshiach!

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

ESSAY SEVEN

THE REAL YOU

A Word Missing?

When the Torah introduces the laws concerning a person who was afflicted with a skin disease known as Tzara'as (commonly confused with leprosy), the Torah states the following:

> "If a person has on the skin of his body..."

When we contrast this introductory verse with the one at the beginning of the Biblical book of Leviticus it appears that there is a word missing in our verse.

When the Torah introduces the section dealing with offerings to the Temple it states:

> "When a person **from you** brings an offering to G-d..."

Commentators note that the Hebrew word "*mikem*" that means "from you" is not employed here with regard to the laws of the Tzara'as and how it is to be treated.

Two Ways of Evaluating Others

One answer that is crucial for our understanding how we should relate to others specifically when they come to us for help and guidance in the area of physical and spiritual "diseases." When we see a person in a compromised situation there are two ways we can view that individual. And likewise when we see a person who appears healthy and robust, either physically or spiritually, there are two opposite ways we tend to view that individual.

How we view the other essentially hinges on what we consider to be the true, authentic, natural and primary state of the individual versus that which is superimposed, secondary and unnatural.

For example, we can see a person who is ill. Our perception of that person is that he or she is an inherently sick individual. And we

can also view a person who is for all intents and purposes a healthy person whose aches and pains are secondary.

Yet the truth and reality of the situation may be the other way around. The person who appeared sick may actually be a fundamentally healthy individual who is suffering from a temporary and peripheral ailment, while the healthy looking person might actually be afflicted with a serious and terminal internal disease that cannot be detected by the naked eye or even by the best instruments.

The difference in our perception and attitude has practical implications. Let us say that a person comes to a physician with an ailment. The physician will obviously have to determine his or her course of action in treating that individual. Often, the doctor sees the gravity of the patient's condition and consciously or subconsciously determines that this patient is fundamentally ill and cannot really be helped. The doctor then decides to not treat the person aggressively. Particularly, if the patient is old, the physician and others may view this person as a fundamentally sick

individual. He or she does not truly appreciate the intrinsic quality of human life at any stage of life.

The same is true on a spiritual plane. A person who suffers from some moral lapses might appear to us so flawed that we give up on trying rehabilitating him or her. And even when the person makes an effort to reverse his or her life and get closer to the right path, we often view it as an insincere gesture, or, at best, one that is doomed to failure. How can an inherently flawed person truly change?

And here is how the Torah wants us to view the efforts of people and their spiritual ailments.

The Cynical Approach

When a person makes an offering to G-d, particularly if that individual has a less than stellar moral and spiritual past, the cynics amongst us will denigrate the person who makes the offering. It is hard for the skeptic to believe that the offering is sincere. And this judgmental spectator will conclude that

the sin was genuine and the offering no more than an afterthought and superficial gesture.

To counter this cynical view the Torah introduces the section dealing with offerings with the words "When a person **from you** brings an offering to G-d..." The words "from you" suggests that this offering is truly from you; it is your true being and identity, even if it was preceded by behavior that was wanting.

By contrast, in this week's Torah reading, where it introduces the skin disease (which our Sages maintain was a manifestation of a spiritual malady; specifically afflicting those who speak ill of others), it leaves out the words "from you." This is to underscore that when it comes to spiritual ailments it is not "from you." These ailments do not define the person. They are secondary to the person; superimposed on their true healthy nature.

The Torah imparts to us the proper attitude we must have to others. We should view their faults as unnatural and extrinsic to their essence and their virtues as natural and intrinsic.

Health of the Jewish People

And what is true about each individual is certainly valid when we reflect on the spiritual health status of the Jewish people. For thousands of years we have been preparing and waiting for the Messianic Age.

It is axiomatic in Judaism that when we, the Jewish people will return to G-d and go on the right path Moshiach will come. Many argue that that phenomenon is so far from being a reality. When we take the pulse of Jewish life these days it seems that we as a people are so far from our ideals. It seems to some critics that we are a nation afflicted with Tzara'as and not one that is bringing offerings to G-d.

The response to that challenge is that when we view the entire nation as a whole, we are a good and righteous nation.

Moreover, as the Rebbe explained, all generations of the Jewish nation are viewed as a collective body. Our body is essentially healthy and in good shape.

While we, as individuals, might have some "aches" and "pains," we are a fundamentally

healthy people and are more than ready for and worthy of the transition into the Age of Redemption.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

ESSAY EIGHT

SEVEN PARADIGM SHIFTS

The skin disorder, tzara'as is a metaphor for Galus/exile and, according to the Talmud is caused by seven sins

Redemption happens when we channel these seven traits into positive actions and attitudes.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

ESSAY EIGHT

SEVEN PARADIGM SHIFTS

Skin Deep

This week's parsha—entitled Metzora—continues with the topic of Tzara'as that was discussed in last week's parsha. Tzara'as is a skin disease that would render the person ritually unclean and require a period of quarantining. Once the person is "cured" from this malady the afflicted person would follow a prescribed purification regimen that would allow him to rejoin his community and family.

Our Sages have stated that this disease was actually a physical manifestation of a spiritual deficiency.

In the Talmud (Sanhedrin 98b), the title Metzora—the person afflicted with Tzara'as—is employed as a metaphor for Moshiach!

How can the Talmud describe Moshiach as a Metzora, a person who is apparently afflicted with a diseased body and a diseased soul?

Chassidic thought explains that the appellation Metzora applied to Moshiach is actually a reflection of the world's state of near perfection in the last moments of Galus/exile. This is exemplified by the way Tzara'as manifests itself. It shows up only on the most external organ of the person—his skin. This suggests that the only vestige of evil that is left appears on the most exterior part of the person. According to the teachings of Kabbalah and Chassidus, Tzara'as therefore only afflicted people who were very spiritual and sensitive to the slightest imperfection.

The Bad News and the Good News

This, surprisingly, is an accurate description of the current state of affairs. The world, through centuries and millennia of good deeds, has refined itself to the point that all of the evil has already been purged from within. Whatever evil still exists has now been

pushed to the surface, the one remaining place where it still rears its ugly face and wreaks havoc on us and even appears to be more potent than ever before.

How can we reconcile this astounding claim with reality? Haven't we seen the worst—even unprecedented—atrocities committed precisely in this past century?

The answer can best be illustrated by way of a simple analogy to a swimming pool that is filled with grease and grime. Imagine a chemical that when added to the water, all of the filth rises to the top. The filth that was previously distributed evenly throughout the entire pool has risen to the surface in a concentrated form. It is true to claim that the pool is cleaner than ever before even as we assert that the filth is now far more concentrated and potent. But there is also a paradox about this claim. For to the uninitiated eye the pool appears filthier than ever. But to the more discerning eye the pool is now pristine pure *except* for the surface which is dirtier than ever, and so all efforts must be directed to skim that dirt from the surface.

The bad news is that the evil still exists and is even more lethal than in the past. As a result, we cannot let down our guard against these malevolent and insidious forces that threaten the Jewish people and the entire world. The good news is that the world has been refined and that all that is now needed is for someone (i.e. all of us) to come and skim the surface and remove the concentration of filth that has risen to the top.

This explains the current state of affairs of our world. All of the positive efforts of the past have succeeded in removing all of the internal evil and have pushed it to the surface.

The rationale for this assertion is that positive energy never dissipates. Negative energies, by contrast, do dissipate with the passage of time. Hence the world has accumulated incredible amounts of positive energy that has penetrated the surface and permeated the 'subterranean' world, pushing the negative energies slowly but surely to the top.

Today's challenge—the challenge for Moshiach and for all of the Jewish people and, indeed, for the entire world in this pre-Redemption era—is to finally rid the world of the skin-deep evil that is the last impediment to an ideal world—the world of Redemption. Moshiach—and by extension, the entire Jewish people—are therefore compared to the Metzora, whose challenge is to remove this peripheral vestige of evil.

The Seven Remedies

The Talmud teaches us that the Tzara'as disease was caused by seven transgressions. (According to the Midrash, the number is expanded from seven to ten sins.)

The seven are: Slander, bloodshed, oaths made in vain, illicit relations, inflated egos, theft, and stinginess (literally: jaundiced eye).

It stands to reason that in the present positive climate where, as stated, the evil is peripheral and the internal positive energies have become more accessible it behooves us to dig beneath the surface to expose these

positive forces. Once that is accomplished the surface evil will also be removed, and the world will experience complete Redemption.

Thus, to counter these seven transgressions that result in Tzara'as we must uncover and instill seven parallel positive forces.

To counter the sin of Lashon Hara (speaking ill of others) one must develop the talent to see the hidden good in the other and assist that person to elicit and actualize that good by speaking positively about them. The most effective way of changing the way we see the other is to study the texts of Torah—specifically the teachings of Chassidut—that focus on the preciousness of the G-dly soul which we each possesses. Appreciating another person's G-dly soul will surely enhance our ability to appreciate the other's potential.

According to the Talmud embarrassing another is a form of bloodshed. To embarrass others is a sign of disrespect for them. Even if we respect their inner goodness because they possess a soul, we might focus on their errant behavior and try to expose it. That is a

form of bloodshed which destroys these persons' self-esteem. To counter that tendency we must learn to see not only the hidden qualities of the others but also their revealed qualities. It does not suffice to tell someone that he/she has potential. We must also focus on their actual good. Again it is in Chassidic literature that we discover the way we are to view a person's faults and virtues. We should only see their faults to the extent that we are motivated to help them. It should never cause us to lose our respect for them.

Uttering an oath in vain—which involves taking G-d's name in vain—evinces a lack of reverence and respect for G-d. The cause of this trivializing of G-d is the world's materialistic and mechanistic mindset. We can effectively counter the indifference to G-d by studying the teachings of Chassidut that help us gain a greater understanding and awareness of G-d's reality, presence, and relevance to our own lives.

By enhancing our modesty we negate the sin of illicit relationships. This we accomplish by developing a healthy and refined attitude

towards the sanctity and beauty of the human body and its role in marriage. Here too Chassidic teaching sheds new light on the holiness of the body. Not only is the soul a G-dly entity but even the body is a holy treasure, and its holiness is revealed through modesty and the way we conduct the most intimate aspects of our relationships.

Countering egocentricity is achieved by acquiring an awareness of G-d's greatness through the study of Torah, specifically through the mystical teachings of Chassidut. With this realization our egos are kept in check because our world now becomes a G-d-centric one.

We counter the sin of theft by respecting another's possessions. Chassidus explains that we are composites of souls, bodies and worldly possessions, which are extensions of our bodies in terms of the soul's mission on earth. The soul's descent into the world is to refine the body as well as the extended body that are our worldly possessions—our share of the world. In a spiritual vein, to steal from someone is tantamount to ripping off a pound of flesh from the other person's body.

Each of us was given possessions for us to elevate and transform from their physical state to a G-dly state. This we accomplish by using our resources for higher spiritual purposes. To steal from others is to deny both to the other and to ourselves the ability to fulfill our G-d given mission.

The last positive trait is to open our eyes and see things and the needs of others in a positive, expansive and liberated light instead of seeing things through the prism of Galus/exile, a flawed view which engenders pessimism, cynicism and pettiness. Stinginess—the last of the seven sins that cause Tzara'as—is a product of a person's very constrained view of life. It is borne out of self-absorption and the narrowest view of one's needs and of the existence of others. Once more it is the knowledge and perception that we gain from the teachings of Chassidus that help us break out of the constraints of Galus and thereby empower us to see things in a totally different light.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

ESSAY NINE

ENVY, DESIRE AND HONOR

The three most destructive traits are envy, desire and pursuit of honor/power.

The Torah teaches us that these three traits can also be positive when channeled properly.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

ESSAY NINE

ENVY, DESIRE AND HONOR

Three Forms of *Tzara'as*

The Torah details three forms of the skin disease known as *nega[im]* or *tazra'as* which render a person *tamei*-ritually unclean. The afflicted individual, known as a *Metzora,* is quarantined and compelled to undergo a complex purification process before reentering the community.

This is how the Torah introduces the subject of *tzara'as:*

> "If a person will have on the skin of his flesh: *s'ais*, *sapachas*, or a *baheres* and it forms (a suspected) lesion of *tzara'as* on the skin of his body, he should be brought to Aaron the priest,

> or to one of his sons, the priests (for examination)."

Our Sages tell us that these lesions were a punishment for the sin of *lashon hara*- slander.

What is the connection between these lesions and the sin of *lashon hara?*

Our Sages explain that *lashon hara* causes the slandered victim to be isolated from the rest of the community. Thus the punishment for the slandering person is measure for measure. He too must be quarantined and separated from the community.

This explanation, however, does not explain what the three forms of *tzara'as,* referred to as *s'eis, sapachas and baheres,* have to do with *lashon hara.*

The Three Vices

One approach is based on a commentary *Shi'yarei Mincha* (by a 20th century rabbi Rachamim Chai Chavitah Hakohen of the island of Djerba, Tunisia). He translates the three forms of *tzara'as* allegorically as

allusions to the three destructive vices which can drive a person from this world, as listed in Ethics of the Fathers (4:28): "Envy, lust and [the pursuit of] honor."

The word *s'eis,* is a cognate of the words for "exalted" and "pride." S*apachas* is related to the Hebrew word *s'fiach*-after growth, which suggests something that goes beyond what is necessary. It can also be rendered as "lust," denoting an excessive desire. B*aheres* is related to the word *bo'eres*-burning (the Hebrew letters *hei* and *ayin* are both guttural sounds and can be interchanged). This term alludes to the "envy" which can burn in one's bones, Proverbs (14:30): "...envy is the rottenness of the bones."

Hence the skin lesions *s'eis, sapchas and baheres* parallel the vices of pride, lust and envy, which, as stated in the abovementioned quote from Ethics of the Fathers, "drive a person from this world."

We can now understand the connection between *tzara'as* and slander. When a person is consumed with envy, lust and pursuit of honor he will eventually confront people who

block him from realizing his nefarious goals. The person driven so will resort to slander to neutralize his opposition.

The remedy for these moral afflictions is to consult Aaron the priest or a Torah scholar, who will help the person uproot these three negative traits.

The Holy Metzora

In Chassidic thought, the person afflicted with *tzara'as* was generally a very righteous person. *Tzara'as* is understood as the righteous person's subtle imperfections being expelled from the body and which show up as lesions on the skin. In contrast, those who were far less righteous would internalize and absorb their negativity. The appearance of lesions for a righteous person thus was a sign of an allergy to evil which manifested on the skin as a result of his system's inability to assimilate *nega*-tivity (pun intended). Indeed, the first two people afflicted with *tzara'as,* mentioned explicitly in the Torah, were Moses and Miriam, two of the holiest people that ever lived!

Moreover, the Moshiach, the ultimate Jewish leader is also described in the Talmud as one who suffers from *tzara'as!*

This imagery is intended to convey the idea that right before the Messianic Age all evil will have been expunged. All the evil that we presently see is skin deep, whereas the positive energy accumulated over thousands of years of good deeds performed run deep beneath the surface. We are presently in that *tzara'as* mode.

In light of this different/positive approach to *tzara'as* how do we explain the three characteristics that are allegorically represented by the terms associated with *tzara'as*: envy-*s'eis,* lust-*sapachas* and honor-*baheres*?

In truth, every negative characteristic has a positive counterpart. This notion is based on Ecclesiastes (7:14): "G-d has created one thing opposite the other." Every vice is countered by a parallel virtue.

If envy, lust and pursuit of honor are destructive forces that "drive a person from this world," there are kosher and even

righteous forms of envy, lust and honor that empower us to transcend the concealing [*olam*-world is connected to the word *helem*-concealment] and conventional aspects of the world.

What are the positive forms of envy, lust and honor?

Kosher Envy

The Talmud (*Bava Basra* 21a) states that it is permissible to set up a competing school to teach Torah to children even if it may cause financial loss to the other school. The basis for this leniency, the Talmud sums up in a few words: "The jealousy of scribes increases wisdom." When one is jealous of another's positive achievements, it motivates him or her to emulate and exceed the other. This will lead to increased knowledge and goodness.

In the mystical tradition "kosher" envy is more than just permissible; it is indeed seen as a totally positive experience. Moreover, the source of jealousy has deep roots in the soul of humanity.

Proverbs (14:30) states: "A tranquil heart is the life of the flesh; but envy is the rottenness of the bones." The Talmud (Shabbos 152b) cites this verse and elaborates: "Whoever has envy in his heart his bones will rot; whoever has no envy in his heart his bones will not rot." The Talmud construes this to mean that even after death the body of one who is devoid of envy will not experience decomposition.

The Rebbe (*Toras Menachem* volume 26 p. 37) focuses on the word bones, in Hebrew-*atzamos,* which is related to the word *atzmus*-essence. Envy affects one's bones, the essence of the body. By extension, envy also touches and degrades the essence of one's soul. If, however, the envy is kosher it leads us to set higher goals, touches our essence and activates it in a positive vein.

In the terminology of Kabbalah, as elucidated by the Tzemach Tzedek (the third Lubavitcher Rebbe in his work, *Or HaTorah, parshas Vayeitzei*), envy is the expression of the Divine energy vested within the lower worlds desiring to rise to the higher more G-dly world. The Torah relates that Rachel was

jealous of her older sister Leah. Leah represented and embodied the higher letter *hei* of G-d's name; whereas Rachel was connected to the lower letter *hei* of G-d's name. In the time of exile the lower *hei* is dominant and the Jewish soul is envious of the time when the higher level *hei* will be fully revealed.

Hence in the present day, as we stand on the threshold of the Redemption and are in a state of *tzara'as,* as mentioned above, we should encourage the positive and holy envy to drive us out of the stifling atmosphere of this world and into the days of Redemption.

The Kosher form of Lust

Lust is generally viewed as a negative because it involves over-indulgence in the sensual aspects of life. Notwithstanding the very positive dimension of intimacy in the context of marriage; lust crosses the line.

Marriage and intimacy are themselves metaphors for the true and ultimate intimacy that we seek with G-d. Indeed, the entire Biblical Book *Shir HaShirim*-the Song of

Songs describes the reciprocal love affair between Israel and G-d (and was therefore designated by Rabbi Akiva as the "Holy of Holies" of Biblical literature). Hence, lust in the form of the passionate desire for the greatest intimacy with G-d is desirable and will come to fruition in the Messianic Age.

As we stand on the threshold of the Messianic Age we should recognize that today's hedonistic tendency of society is a reminder that we will soon experience true desire and bliss with the imminent coming of Moshiach. And if that is what the near future holds in store for us why not begin now by becoming a spiritual "hedonist?"

The Kosher form of Honor

The pursuit of honor and glory is a vice which can also be turned into a virtue. The obsession some have with seeking honor derives from the soul's passion to introduce G-d's honor and glory to the world. Ethics of the Fathers (6:11) states: "All that the Holy One, Blessed is He, Created in His world, He created only for His glory," as is stated in

Isaiah (43:7): "All that is called by My name, for My glory I created it, formed it and made it."

The soul's desire for generating G-d's glory in this world often gets confused with the Animal Soul's selfish interests, which misinterprets the signal from the G-dly Soul as a desire for honor of self.

Go to Aaron

To illustrate the heightened state of consciousness related to *tzara'as,* we must turn to Aaron. He was consumed with love for his fellow and in whose heart burnt intense passion for G-d. We should "envy" him and emulate his manner of speech and action.

This should be followed by developing a kosher "lust" and passionate desire to get closer to G-d. To achieve this too we must be brought to Aaron and his sons, whose passion for G-d was legendary.

And, finally, we must not be content with satisfying our **own** desire for spiritual growth

as suggested by the first two traits of positive envy and passion. We must also strive to satisfy **G-d's** desire to have a "dwelling place" in this physical realm, and reveal His glory to the entire world. Towards this end we must also follow the example of Aaron and his sons, whose lives were devoted to bringing the Divine presence into the Beis Hamikdash- the Holy Temple. We must create our own miniature Sanctuaries in our homes and communities.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

ESSAY TEN

FUSING TOHU AND TIKKUN:

THE CHALLENGE OF THE MESSIANIC AGE

The world of Tohu is a chaotic world. The world of Tikkun is a limited world.

Our challenge is to unleash the power and passion of Tohu into the balanced and peaceful state of Tikkun.

That is Moshiach.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

ESSAY TEN

FUSING TOHU AND TIKKUN:

THE CHALLENGE OF THE MESSIANIC AGE

Why are our Relationships so Challenged Today?

If our relationships were challenged from the day humans were created, there seems to be a significant exacerbation of tensions and discord in our own day and age. And these tensions seem to be pervasive in all strata of Jewish society and across the entire spectrum of Jews.

What is the cause of this breakdown, and how do we repair it?

One answer to this issue can be found in this week's parsha which deals with a strange phenomenon called tzara'as, incorrectly translated as leprosy. Tzara'as is a skin disease that our Sages teach us was actually a physiological response to a spiritual

imbalance caused by abusing the gift of speech G-d has given us. And since communication is an indispensible part of any relationship it follows that the phenomenon of tzara'as carries within it the reason for the breakdown of relationships and the cure for it as well. And this notion of the breakdown of relationships is further reflected in the way the afflicted—the Metzora—must be quarantined, isolated from others. This was to help the person realize how his actions caused discord.

The Mystical Approach to Tzara'as

In Chassidic thought we are taught that only very spiritually sensitive people would "break out" with these tzara'as skin lesions. Tzara'as is the inability of the person to internalize the most sublime G-dly energies. In the lexicon of Kabbalah this powerful surge of spiritual energy is referred to the "lights of Tohu (Chaos)".

Tohu—in contradistinction with the balanced world of Tikkun, the world we inhabit—is a spiritual "domain" in which the energy that is

generated is too powerful for the instruments through which it is transmitted, which results in a spiritual form of short-circuiting. Moreover, Tohu, because each of its diverse components is so intense, has no room for fusion and balance among the various competing forces. Kindness and judgment, for example, cannot coexist in the world of Tohu.

Tohu-oriented souls are therefore people whose spiritual passion can be too much for their systems to contain. A Tikkun personality, by contrast, carves out a comfortable spiritual niche and is never in danger of his or her soul's short-circuiting.

Alternatively, Tohu personalities may have a hard time coexisting with others because their personalities clash. A person imbued with a Tohu-kindness and loving personality cannot find any room for those who favor discipline or are judgmental. Conversely, one who is stern and judgmental will not be able to tolerate those loving personalities. Each personality type is so intense that he or she cannot get along with another whose personality is likewise very strong and

passionate, although in a very different direction.

By contrast, a Tikkun personality is one whose energy is limited and easily contained. And because their traits are tempered they are better at harmonizing their own traits and likewise finding common ground with others.

The Biblical prototypes of the first Tohu phenomenon of intense passion were Nadav and Avihu, Aaron's two eldest sons. In their zeal to get closer G-d—as we read in last week's parsha—they brought an unauthorized offering and were themselves consumed by a heavenly fire. Or Hachaim and Chassidic texts explain that their demise was a direct result of their inability to internalize the intense passion of their Tohu souls.

The second Tohu prototype is the tragic Talmudic story of the 24,000 students of the great Sage, Rabbi Akiva. Because of their inability to get along with each other they all died in a terrible plague. To this day we observe the days between Passover and

Shavuot as days of minimized joy because of that tragedy. Kabbalah and Chassidic literature attribute their demise to their souls originating in the chaotic and discordant world of Tohu.

Galus=Tohu Energy

Another manifestation of the Tzara'as/Tohu syndrome is the very phenomenon of Galus/exile. The Rebbe explains (*Sefer HaSichos*, 5751, *parshat Tazria-Metzora*), that the entire phenomenon of *Galus* is the setting where the most sublime energies are in play. But because there is no mechanism for these sublime energies to be accessed and experienced by us, the energy often manifests itself in negative ways. In some, it can motivate them to try to escape the confining and stifling world that we inhabit. In others, it creates tension and the breakdown of relationships.

Our challenge is to bring an end to Galus and usher in the Messianic Age so that the transcendent *Galus/Tohu* energies will be capable of being received and internalized by

us. In the future Messianic Age we will enjoy the best of both worlds—the fusion of the Passion of Tohu with the stability and tranquility of Tikkun. In truth, both Tohu and Tikkun personalities have their pros and cons. The impression that a Tohu personality is a wholly negative one—and that Nadav, Avihu and the students of Rabbi Akiva, were all negative figures in our history—is wrong. The Tohu personality actually possesses certain qualities that the Tikkun personality lacks and is encouraged to acquire.

Tikkun personalities, because the energy generated in them is limited, do not have much passion, comparatively speaking, for their own ideals. The amount of spiritual energy they invest in their lives is moderate to minimal. They cannot start revolutions or bring about radical changes for the good. Sure, they can get along with others, but in many cases this might be simply because they don't really stand for much. There is no room for any clashes because their personalities are bland and lack much forcefulness. Of course, there are different degrees of Tikkun personalities. But, generally

speaking the Tikkun personality is not ready to rock the boat.

Conversely, Tohu personalities exhibit a lack of knowing what their mission is in this world. Because of their passion for their ideals they lose sight of how their passion actually leads them to self-destruct, and often they take others along with them.

In terms of the general purpose of existence—to make this world a dwelling place for G-d—the Tohu personality does not contribute to this ultimate goal.

With a Tohu personality who lacks the ability to fulfill his or her mission on earth —we are left with *Galus*. Tikkun personalities do not generate any real spiritual changes, and we are left with the status quo—*Galus*.

It seems that whether we are Tohu-oriented or Tikkun-oriented we seem to be locked into a *Galus* fixture from which we cannot extricate ourselves. And this is indeed the cause of all the breakdowns in our relationships. They are either overwhelmed by a surge of Tohu energy which undermines their ability to find common ground with the

other, or they are deficient in any active life and inspiration. The very measured and often muted energy of the Tikkun personality can take the life out of a good relationship.

The Remedy: Fusing Tohu and Tikkun

The answer to this challenge of relationships is the same answer to the challenge of Galus. The ultimate goal is to synthesize the Tohu personality with the Tikkun mindset. And this is what the Messianic Age is all about. It will be punctuated by the best of both worlds: in the Rebbe's words: "The lights of Tohu will be introduced into the vessels of Tikkun."

The passion and zeal of the Tohu personality will not be compromised. Rather it will be infused with a new sense of mission and harmony. The soul's heightened sensitivity and love will not conflict with its sense of mission to relate to and change the world. And the sense of responsibility to respect the limitations of the world in which we live and operate will not dull the sheen nor dampen the natural ardor and energy of our soul.

Torah with Humility

How do we introduce the Messianic synthesis of the intensity of Tohu into the balanced tranquility of Tikkun?

In the foregoing discourse the Rebbe explains that this balance is achieved through the study of Torah. Torah represents the attribute of *tiferes,* which means beauty or harmony. Torah study—particularly the parts of Torah that discuss Moshiach and Redemption—has the capacity to unify opposites and blend them harmoniously, thereby taking the sublime energy of Tohu and internalizing it in the "broad vessels"—the "grounding" properties of Tikkun—fusing the best of both the worlds of Tohu and of Tikkun.

Without the harmony of Torah study—and the concomitant humility to enable us to absorb its synthesizing power—we are left with tremendous energy that cannot be internalized and that leads to a state of *Tzara'as*; i.e. the state of discord and alienation—broken relationships.

A Suggestion

Perhaps we can add that the divisions that exist today are directly related to the mutually exclusive tendencies of the Tohu and Tikkun personalities. A Tohu person has no patience for the conventions that the Tikkun person follows. And, likewise, a Tikkun person feels overwhelmed by the energy and unconventionality of the Tohu personality.

The first thing is for both classes to follow the Rebbe's guidance and integrate the other's attitude into their own lives. But this requires a healthy dose of humility. Both have to be capable of accepting the other person's approach and integrate and incorporate it into their own.

Even where that proves difficult the alternative could be to join together with the other. In the interests of bringing Moshiach it behooves the more reserved among us (the "Tikkun" personalities) to look to the more dynamic members of our community to guide us, while the more passionate members should look to the Tikkun people to find

ways of making their powerful ideas accessible, understandable, and palatable to others.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

ESSAY ELEVEN

GUARD YOUR THOUGHTS

As important as it is to guard our tongue from negative and slanderous speech; it is even more important to alter our thought patterns.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

ESSAY ELEVEN

GUARD YOUR THOUGHTS

Why Skin Disease?

This week's twin parshiyos—Tazria-Metzora—address the person who was stricken with a skin disease known as *tzara'as*, often mistranslated as leprosy. In fact, our Sages tell us that this condition was a direct consequence of a person who would be guilty of the sin of *lashon hara*, the evil tongue or slander. When a person would break out with these skin lesions he would know that he had slandered another. Even Moses and Miriam, two of the greatest and most saintly people that lived, we are told, were stricken with this disease because of some mildly disparaging things they said.

The question can be asked, why would G-d choose to afflict the person guilty of Lashon

Hara with a skin disease? Why specifically the skin? If it was intended as a punishment for the transgression of gossip, there are so many other ways one could have been punished. Why of all the organs and limbs of the person was the skin singled out for this affliction?

Exposing the Negativity

One explanation is that the sin of Lashon Hara is essentially one in which a person has **verbalized** and **externalized** the otherwise inner, private negative thoughts about another. If people would have kept their negative thoughts to themselves and not spread the slanderous information to others, their negative feelings would have remained inside. Now that it has been exposed to the outside world, the "punishment" is that their **outermost** organ—their skin—becomes diseased, as a way of saying that the sin was not the thought itself, but the verbalizing and exposing of the negative information to others.

To be sure, negative thoughts about others are just as evil. Indeed, the Alter Rebbe, the founder of the Chabad Chassidic movement, in his classic work, the Tanya, states that evil thoughts have a more detrimental effect on the person's soul since thought is closer to the soul than speech.

Passover: Freedom of Speech Preceded by Freedom of Thought

Bas Ayin, a Chassidic commentary on the Torah, takes this notion a step further:

In many years, we read this parsha that deals with negative speech in the Shabbos that precedes Passover; a Shabbos that is also known as Shabbos Hagadol: the great Sabbath.

Bas Ayin explains that the word for Passover in Hebrew "Pesach" is actually a composite of two words: *Peh* and *sach*, which means a "mouth that speaks." This suggests that the spiritual focus of Passover is about the power of speech. When our speech is tainted it is in exile. It is held hostage by the various influences that "compel" us to say things that

are inappropriate either because they go against G-d, one's fellow or against one's own spiritual identity.

Passover, as the Holiday of Liberation is thus the time that our speech can be liberated.

However, the Shabbos before Passover we focus on the purity of our **thoughts**. Before we can control the way in which we speak, it is imperative that we learn how to control our thoughts, because ultimately if our thoughts are improper it is just a matter of time before we blurt out something that was on our mind for so long.

Thus, the Shabbos before Passover, when the focus is on our thoughts, the source and root of our speech, is referred to as the "Great Shabbos" because it represents the liberation of the thoughts that precede and are even more important than the liberation of our speech. Passover is the "regular" Shabbos because its focus is on speech, and the Shabbos before is the "great" Shabbos because its emphasis is on the purity and liberation of thought.

Obviously, when a person speaks ill of another and is guilty of the sin of Lashon Hara, he or she has also thought ill of the other. It is rare that one should speak evil words without first having harbored these negative feelings in one's mind and heart.

We can now understand why the Metzora—the person afflicted with the skin disease—had to be quarantined. It was not—as some erroneously think—due to the contagious nature of this disease, for there is no evidence that it was contagious.

The classic reason given by our Sages is that Lashon Hara causes people to be shunned and isolated. Thus the slanderer gets a taste of his own medicine and is also isolated.

Double Quarantining

But, the Torah describes situations in which the person has to be quarantined **twice**. What is the reason for the second week of isolation?

One might suggest that one week of isolation was intended to have the person realize the

evil in publicizing negative information about the other via the medium of speech. One learns how destructive and painful the power of speech can be by having to witness the detrimental effects of the disease affecting one's most **external** organ.

However, the second period of seclusion was provided to enable the guilty party to get to the very root of his sin—the evil thoughts that he harbored that led him to speaking evil. It is not enough to just focus on the awesome power of speech; one must also reflect on the even more awesome power of thought and its role.

Positive Speech and Thought

Whatever is true in the realm of negativity is equally true in the realm of goodness. Positive speech is what reveals the hidden positive energy that is latent or just beneath the surface. The more we say positive things about G-d, other people, positive values and experiences, etc., the more we help these things materialize.

Thus, the emphasis on speaking about Moshiach and the future Redemption. Speaking about it helps to make these powerful energies come to the surface and actually materialize in the most literal and obvious sense.

How do we get ourselves to speak about these positive matters?

It is by reaching in to our thought processes and learning to think in a positive way; learning how to think in Redemption oriented fashion.

And how to we cultivate the proper positive thoughts?

We accomplish this by learning more Torah; specifically the parts of Torah that discuss the concepts of freedom, Moshiach and the future world of goodness and true peace.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

ESSAY TWELVE

THE FIVE BOOKS AND FIVE MODES OF SPEECH

The power of speech is what makes us human. Compromising speech compromises our humanity.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

ESSAY TWELVE

THE FIVE BOOKS AND FIVE MODES OF SPEECH

Tzara'as Therapy

This week's "twin" parsha discusses, in vivid detail, the laws concerning the unusual disease called *tzara'as*. This disease can manifest itself on one's body with skin lesions. It can show up on a garment or even on one's house. The Torah discusses at length how this person, garment or house is to be treated and purified.

According to the Talmudic Sages these diseases occurred as a result of the sin of *lashon hara*, speaking ill of others.

In this twin parsha, the Torah employs the expression: "This is the law (Torah)" in relation to *tzara'as* five times. This has prompted the Midrash to state:

"Whoever speaks *lashon hara* is tantamount to violating the five books of the Torah"

Commentators point out that there are allusions to *lashon hara* in each of the Five Books of Moses, which explains why violation of this law is considered to be the equivalent of violating each of these five books.

In Genesis we read of Adam pointing the accusing finger of guilt at his wife, saying that she had given him to eat of the forbidden fruit. One may also add the story of Joseph who would offer negative reports of his brothers to his father Jacob.

In Exodus we read of how Dasan and Aviram reported Moses' killing of the Egyptian taskmaster to Pharaoh.

In Leviticus we have, as stated, almost two entire sections devoted to the subject of *tzara'as* which was a punishment for *lashon hara*. In addition, the Torah expressly commands us in this book not to be talebearers, a form of *lashon hara*.

In Numbers, we have the story of Miraim, Moses' sister, who mildly slandered her brother Moses. We also have the story of the

spies who slandered the Land of Israel when they returned from their mission of scouting the land.

And in the book of Deuteronomy we read of the command to be careful in observing the laws of *tzara'as*, which, as noted, was a result of *lashon hara*.

What is the significance of these five books containing each an allusion to *lashon hara*? And what difference does it make if these references were contained in one book or in five?

Upon reflection we must conclude that *lashon hara* is not just given an "honorable" (or, more precisely, a dishonorable) mention in each of the five books. There is an organic connection between the central theme of each of these books and *lashon hara*.

Genesis Challenge

The Book of *Bereishis*/Genesis, as its name suggests, is about the origins of the world and of the Jewish people. It is about the seeds that G-d planted in the world at large and

then in the Land of Israel in particular. When Adam sinned, he might have been forgiven if he had accepted full responsibility. Instead he put the blame on Eve. Adam could therefore not be the father of the Jewish nation whose role it would be to make the world a "dwelling place for G-d."

Indeed, Adam was even expelled from the Garden of Eden because he could no longer tend to it. In the end, he did not even merit to be the father of humanity. All of his descendants except Noach and his immediate family perished. G-d, as it were, "had" to start all over. The first rule of leadership is to assume responsibility for your actions. Adam's negative speech undermined his role as the one who would begin the process of making the world a "dwelling" for G-d.

In a somewhat different vein, Joseph's negative reporting caused a rift between him and his brothers that resulted in his sale and ultimately the Egyptian bondage. It undermined the genesis of the Jewish people and was a portent of the division of the future that would lengthen the exile.

Exodus in Peril

The Book of *Shemos*/Exodus is about liberation. It is also about the Jewish people becoming a unique nation when they received the Torah at Mount Sinai. That experience equipped them with the knowledge and the spiritual energy to fulfill their mission to transform the world into G-d's home.

But this process was in peril when Moses heard the two rebels Dasan and Aviram slander him and ultimately inform on him to Pharaoh. Moses was concerned, Rashi tells us, that this vice could prove to be a setback for their liberation. A people that turns against its own cannot survive as a people.

G-d's "experiment" with the nascent Jewish nation was in danger of being aborted, Moses was apprehensive.

Undermining Holiness

The third book of the Torah, *Vayikra*/Leviticus, is about the unique role a *kohain* plays in the service of the Beis Hamikdash, the Holy Temple. It is a book

about holy places, people and offerings. The Hebrew name *Vayikra*, which means "And He called," refers to the special endearing way G-d communicates with Moses and by extension to all of Israel.

Nothing can distance one from holiness and from this endearing relationship with G-d more than *lashon hara* and the discord it sows. Thus, the person afflicted with this disease must be exiled outside of walled, i.e., holy cities in Israel. Holiness cannot tolerate the person who searches for the negative in others and exposes it.

The very word *metzora*, which is used by the Torah to describe the person afflicted with *tzara'as* (incorrectly translated as leprosy), connotes, "one who discovers negativity" or/and "one who exposes negativity." This obviously does not apply to one who exposes another's flaws in order to help them deal with it or to protect unsuspecting people from being harmed.

Challenging Leaders

The fourth book of Numbers is about the Jewish nation's traversing the desert (hence the Hebrew name for the book "*Bamidbar*" under the leadership of Moses. This sojourning in the desert was a portent of the journey of the Jewish nation through all of history on the way to the Promised Land of the era of Redemption.

The nature of *lashon hara* people is to criticize their leaders, in particular. Miriam in a subtle and unintentional way, and the spies in a more crass, vulgar and rebellious fashion, directed their barbs against Moses and indeed against G-d.

This attitude is what undermines Jewish continuity because Jewish people can only thrive when they have a cohesive existence under the guidance of competent leaders. To slander the leader threatens to unravel the chords that bind us together as a people and threaten our existence amongst what is Biblically called, "the desert of nations."

In addition, the name Numbers is a reflection of the census taken by Moses. It was his way

of regimenting the Jews into a cohesive group to ensure survival and an efficient march through the real and virtual desert. *Lashon hara* against the leader and the destination, which is to enter into the Land of Israel, renders the census an exercise in futility.

Undermining Our Future

And finally, the Book of Deuteronomy is a book in which Moses restates the Torah. It is known in Hebrew as the book of *Devarim*, which means words. It is the ultimate book of communication. Moses communicates the Torah to the Jewish people in a restated version of it. This was so that the teachings of the Torah would be relevant, accessible, meaningful and palatable to the Jewish nation that was about to embark on the final leg of its journey—entering into the Promised Land.

The book of Deuteronomy is also about the final goal and destination of the Jewish people which is to leave exile and return to the Promised Land with Moshiach.

The restatement of the Torah by Moses can also be viewed as a sample of the new dimensions of Torah that will be revealed in the Messianic Age by Moshiach.

Towards this end it is crucial that one does not misuse the gift of speech that can pour cold water on our hopes and aspirations. Improper speech can sow doubts and cool off our enthusiasm for Moshiach and Redemption and G-d forbid delay the onset of the Messianic Age and the receiving of the new dimensions of Torah.

In short, seeing the negative in others, taints our Genesis/humanity; Exodus/status as a nation Leviticus/holiness; Numbers/journey through exile and Deuteronomy/final transition into Redemption.

Five in One

In truth, all five elements are inherent in Moshiach and Redemption.

In that age, G-d's plan will become a reality: the entire world will become a Garden of Eden, a reality that eluded Adam. Moshiach is

obviously all about Redemption of a united people. Moshiach is about building the third Beis Hamikdash and thereby revealing the hidden dimensions of holiness of the world at large and of the Jewish people in particular. The belief in and hope for Moshiach is what makes our sojourn through the desert of nations a shorter and more manageable trip. Moshiach, who, as our Sages tell us, embodies Moses' soul, is also the ultimate communicator of Torah's essence. It is Moshiach who will make even the most esoteric matters understandable.

All of these qualities that parallel the Five Books of Moses can be undermined, tainted or delayed when our speech and thoughts are geared to elicit the negativity of others. Conversely, positive speech has the capacity to: reveal the Garden of Eden and spread it to the entire world, liberate and sanctify the Jewish people, enable them to travel smoothly and quickly through the last moments of exile and become receptive to Moshiach's teachings.

ESSAY THIRTEEN

CHOOSE LIFE!

One can fight negativity with negativity or with light.

The Chassidic approaches prefers the latter.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

ESSAY THIRTEEN

CHOOSE LIFE!

Two Schools of Thought

There are two approaches to dealing with evil, both on the micro level and on the macro level. The first approach is to focus on the evil and its destructive power. The second approach seeks to accentuate the positive and allow the light to dispel the darkness.

The contrast between these approaches illustrates one of the salient differences between the ethical teachings of Judaism known as Mussar and the spiritual dimension of Judaism, particularly the teachings of Chassidus.

Both approaches are rooted in the early teachings of our Sages and even in Biblical literature. As we shall see, these two approaches, and the Torah's preference for the positive approach, are hinted at in the

beginning of this week's parsha (Tazria-) Metzora.

Before we address the hint in this week's parsha, we will first cite the explicit references to it in Biblical and Talmudic literature.

King David states in Psalm 33:

> "Who is the man who desires life, who loves days of seeing good? Guard your tongue from evil, and your lips from speaking deceit. Turn from evil and do good, seek peace and pursue it."

This Psalm does not make it clear which of the two approaches is superior. Is it the turning away from evil, which is mentioned first? Or perhaps it is the doing of good, which follows the instruction to turn from evil in this verse, because it represents a higher level of spirituality?

Similarly, the Talmud (Berachos 5a) describes these two approaches to dealing with one's own inner evil impulses:

> "Rabbi Levi bar Chama said in the name of Rabbi Shimon ben Lakish:

> A person should constantly provoke his Good Inclination [to wage war-Rashi] against his Evil Inclination, as it is stated, 'Tremble [i.e., be provoked] and sin not.' (Psalms 4:5).
>
> If he vanquishes it, fine. But if not, he should engage in Torah study, as it is stated [in the continuation of the verse], 'say in your hearts.'
>
> If he vanquishes it fine. But if not, he should recite the Shema, as it is stated [there], 'on your beds.'
>
> If he vanquishes it, fine. But if not, he should remind himself of the day of death, as it is stated [there] 'and be utterly silent forever.'"

The Talmud outlined both approaches and alternated between them in this passage. First, it advocated provoking the Good Inclination into a fight with the Evil Inclination. As a last resort, it recommended invoking the memory of death as a way of jolting the person into shunning evil. Between these two "negative" approaches, the Talmud suggested the study of Torah and reciting of

the Shema, which are positive approaches to dealing with one's evil.

Again, it is not clear from this Talmudic citation which approach is the preferred and superior approach.

Throughout Jewish history, there were proponents of both approaches. However, with the advent of the Ba'al Shem Tov and subsequent leaders of the Chassidic movement, the positive approach was given a major boost. Indeed, this positive approach has, in recent times, been embraced by many other communities as well.

One can ask is why our approach to dealing with evil has changed in the last few centuries?

For the Children

A Chassidic commentary, *Ner Avraham*, discovers a hint of the Chassidic perspective in the words of the Torah in the Book of Deuteronomy (30:19):

> "I have set before you life or death, blessing or curse. Choose life! Then you and your children will live."

Commentators find the phraseology of this verse baffling.

First, does G-d give us death and curses?

Second, why was it even necessary to mention that the alternative to life and blessing is death and curse?

Third, why would the Torah have to tell us to choose life? Isn't that self-evident?

The answer is that the Torah is actually prescribing two approaches to dealing with evil. One is to embrace the life-empowering study of Torah. The other approach is to focus on the reprehensible nature of evil and its deadly power.

Although, these are both legitimate approaches to the problem of evil, the Torah encourages us to "choose life." In so doing, the Torah means that one is to vanquish evil by immersing oneself in the life sustaining teachings of Torah, rather than employing the element of fear and threat of death.

When a person combats evil with the Torah of Life and the Torah of Light, it renders the process of dealing with evil positive and joyous. It kills the two proverbial birds with one stone, it gets rid of the evil and it enhances our lives.

Moreover, our children thrive when they see our upbeat and positive demeanor. We model for them that living a Jewish life is a wholly positive and even exhilarating experience. By contrast, when a child sees an angry parent, one who is constantly fighting battles, albeit for the good, he or she can be "turned-off" to Judaism. Negative energy rarely attracts adherents.

It is to this end that the verse which exhorts us to choose life concludes: "Then you and your children will live." When we adopt the transformative positive approach to evil it gives life to ourselves and instills it in our children as well.

Finding Evil and Eradicating Evil

Ner Avraham finds an additional hint to the Torah's preference for fighting evil with life

in the opening verse of parshas Metzora, which discusses the manner by which a Metzora, a person afflicted with a rare skin disease, is to be purified:

> "G-d spoke to Moses, saying: This will be the Torah [law] of the Metzora, on the day of his ritual purification, and he should be brought to the Kohain-priest."

Or HaChaim questions the necessity of this introductory verse. The Torah could have begun discussing the purification rites of a Metzora by simply stating: "A Metzora is purified by coming to the Kohain etc." Why the need to emphasize that "This is the Torah of the Metzora"?

The answer lies in the deeper meaning of the world Metzora. It is said to be a contraction of two words: Motzi ra, usually translated as "one who finds evil." The conventional understanding is that the Metzora's affliction is caused by his penchant to find evil in others. One may, however, suggest an alternate translation: "one who wishes to eradicate the evil" from oneself.

Let us cite the verse once more and interpret it in light of the foregoing novel translation of the word Metzora:

> "It is through Torah [study] that one who wishes to eradicate the evil, can do so on the day of his purification..."

Now we can see that the Torah alludes here to the person who wishes to rid himself of the negativity that caused him to see the negative in others. This he can do by employing the positive approach, namely through the study of Torah.

Immediate Results

There is another significant difference between the two approaches:

If the negative approach works it is fine, but if it doesn't work it can actually cause one to become depressed, leading to even more negativity in that person's life. Depression leaves one vulnerable to all sorts of transgressions inasmuch as it suppresses the person's spiritual immune system. By contrast, even if one's study of Torah does

not succeed in eradicating one's negativity, Torah study itself is an intrinsically positive and worthwhile experience. It is not just a means to an end, it is also an end.

This explains the concluding words of the parsha's verse: "on the day of his purification." One of the benefits of following the positive approach to overcome evil is that some of its beneficial effects are immediate. Thus, states the Torah, the purification is effected on that very day.

Moshiach - the Ultimate Positive Approach

The Talmud informs us that Moshiach is also referred to as a Metzora!

On the surface this designation for the most spiritual individual is puzzling.

One possible explanation, in light of the above, is that Moshiach is the ultimate eradicator of evil and negativity.

How does Moshiach accomplish the goal of ridding the world of war and hatred, among other vices and forms of negativity? His primary force is the study and teaching of

Torah. Moshiach, in addition to being the ultimate leader, is also the consummate teacher of Torah. According to the Kabbalah, Moshiach's uniqueness as a Torah teacher is that he will impart the most esoteric aspects of Torah to all.

What distinguishes the esoteric parts of the Torah from all the other teachings of Torah?

The Kabbalists explain that the revealed parts of Torah deal with the realities of our world. Thus, this part of Torah is called the "Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil." It is the Divine blueprint for changing a world that is a mixture of good and evil. The teachings of Kabbalah and Chassidus—and especially the teachings that will be revealed by Moshiach—by contrast, are referred to as "the Tree of Life." It is Torah in its most pure, pristine and positive state.

The Torah thus informs us that Moshiach, the Metzora, will bring about the "day of purification", i.e., the Messianic Age, primarily, by teaching Torah.

We can now understand the emphasis of the Chassidic movement on the positive approach

and the reason why it has been adopted by so many in recent times. One cited explanation is that we have been so crushed by the harshest exile conditions that following the negative approach would destroy us and set us back even more. We cannot afford to become depressed.

However, in light of the above, we can see that there is a much deeper explanation for the Chassidic emphasis on the positive approach, and its virtual universal acceptance. As we get closer to the Messianic Age, we must prepare for the time when the exclusive approach will be the positive one—through the study of the most positive manifestation of the Divine knowledge.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

ESSAY FOURTEEN

RECIPROCITY

Judaism believes in its leaders. The leaders inspire and ignite the spark in his followers.

Their ignited spark then empowers the leader to lead.

There is no end to this cycle.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

ESSAY FOURTEEN

RECIPROCITY

Who Goes to Whom?

The Torah commences this week's parsha with the following description of the purification process for the person who has contracted *tzara'as,* an enigmatic skin disease (commonly confused with leprosy):

> "This will be the law of the *Metzora*; on the day of his purification. He should be brought to the *Kohain*-priest. The Kohain should go forth to the outside of the camp; the Kohain shall look, and behold! – the *tzara'as* had been healed from the *Metzora…"*

In this brief introductory passage many questions arise:

First, Rashi addresses the question, why does the Torah state that this law applies to the "**day** of his ritual purification?" What does the

word "day" add? The Torah could have stated simply: "This will be the law of purification for the *Metzora*."

Second, why does it say "the *tzara'as* has been healed from the *Metzora*?" Don't we already know that the *Metzora* is the one who is afflicted with *tzara'as*. It could have simply stated "the *tzara'as* has been healed" or "the *Metzora* was healed,"

Lastly, it says that he is brought to the Kohain and immediately afterwards it says that the Kohain goes outside the camp, implying that the Kohain goes out to the *Metzora*. Which is it? Does the *Metzora* go to the Kohain or does the Kohain go to the *Metzora*.

The Future Purification

The key to answering these questions is a fourth question: why does it introduce this section with the words, "This **will be** the law of the *Metzora*?" Couldn't it just say, "This is law of the *Metzora?*" Why is the verb associated with implementation of this law in the future tense?

The answer is that the ultimate realization of the purification of the *Metzora* phenomenon will be in the future Messianic Age.

The Torah thus states: "This **will be** the law of the *Metzora*; on the **day** of his purification." The term "day" is a reference to the future Messianic Age when G-d's light, which will illuminate the darkness, will render all of our existence as day. And it is then that we will be completely healed from all forms of imperfection, including *tzara'as* which affects the most external aspects of the individual.

Emulating Aaron

To effect this transformation of the darkness of the night of exile into the light of the day of Redemption one must be brought to Aaron the Priest.

Each and every Jew is admonished to emulate Aaron the Priest. In Ethics of the Fathers (1:12) the sage Hillel is quoted:

> "Be among the disciples of Aaron, loving peace and pursuing peace,

loving all created beings and bringing them closer to the Torah."

Hillel identifies four traits of Aaron that we must follow:

First, we must love peace. Even when one is legitimately disputing matters of principle and values, one must never lose his or her commitment to peace. One must love the peace that will come when the differences are resolved.

Second, one must "pursue peace." It does not suffice to feel a desire for peace; one must also actively seek means to bring about reconciliation.

Third, one must love all created beings. It does not suffice to cherish peace because it is a less stressful state to be in than conflict. The pursuit of peace then becomes a selfish endeavor. Hillel's admonition to us is to want peace because it is based on and motivated by love for the other. Even if the other appears to be utterly wrong and his sole visible positive trait being that he or she is "G-d's creation," one should still cultivate love for him or her.

Fourth, one must also bring these people closer to the Torah. As the Rebbe emphasized on many occasions, it does not say "bring the Torah closer to them" but rather bring them closer to the Torah. This implies that we must never compromise the Torah to make it palatable to others. Rather we must find ways of raising them up to the Torah.

While we must pursue every avenue for peace and express unadulterated love for the other even if he or she is wrong on crucial moral issues, we must never compromise on the standards of the Torah to accomplish the above.

Come to Aaron

Applying all this to the ultimate purification of the *Metzora* we see that we must all have mentors who fulfill Hillel's directive to follow in Aaron's path.

The Torah states that the *Metzora* shall be brought to the Kohain. This means that the person who is need of direction and purification shall recognize that he or she

cannot do it alone and must depend on the other (the Aarons) to assist.

Throughout history, the Jewish people knew that they depended on their leaders for their moral and spiritual advancement not just for the stability and prosperity which a good leader would bring to the community.

In order to enjoy the full benefits of the Aarons in our lives we must humbly recognize how much they contribute to our spiritual well-being and not ascribe our progress to our own brilliance and hard work.

One of the hallmarks of the Rebbe/mentor-chosid/disciple relationship is the total submission of the disciple to his or her mentor. This devotion is what allows us to be receptive to his guidance and accept the flow of the mentor's spiritual energy and enlightenment to the follower.

In light of this statement, our original question becomes even more insistent: Why does the Torah juxtapose the statement that the *Metzora* must be brought to the Kohain with a contradictory statement that implies

that the Kohain must go out of the camp to the *Metzora*?

Rights or Obligations

The answer lies in our understanding of the differences between Jewish values and the prevailing secular values in society today.

In the secular world, society is divided into advocacy groups. Each group lobbies for its own interests and for securing its own rights. The hope is that when members on both sides of a divide act with due diligence in favor of their constituency, fairness and equitable solutions will ensue.

For example: our society is made up of leaders and followers; vendors and consumers; doctors and patients; lawyers and clients etc. Each group looks out for its own interest and the protection of its rights. In theory at least, the outcome should be an equitable balance between interests. However, in reality, we find a society deeply polarized along these self-serving divisions.

In Judaism, however, the focus is not on rights but on obligations. The vendor has to focus on what his obligation is to his customer and the customer has to think about his obligations to the vendor. Each constituency is looking out for the other.

With respect to the relationship between the leaders and mentors (the "Aarons") and their followers there is a need for a reciprocal attitude. While the followers must be brought to Aaron and recognize that it is he who enables their healing, the leaders themselves have to see it in the very opposite way. The genuine Jewish leader feels that all of his capabilities derive from the people he mentors and assists.

So while the *Metzora* must be brought to the Kohain and show his total dependence on him, the Kohain must also feel that he is beholden to the one he services, and by going out to the *Metzora* he is empowered to achieve his goal of helping others.

We can now understand why the Torah states, "The *tzara'as* has been healed from the *Metzora.*" The question was asked, why add

the words "from the *Metzora*?" Don't we already know that the *Metzora* is the one who is afflicted with *tzara'as?*

The answer is that the Kohain, to whom the *Metzora* must be brought and upon whom his purification depends, must also recognize that the Kohain's ability to heal is not his own. He derives this power from the *Metzora* himself. It is the *Metzora* who has the spark of holiness within him that empowers the Kohain to be able to heal. The *Metzora* thus attributes his healing to the Kohain and the Kohain ascribes his power to heal to the innate healing powers of the *Metzora*.

Long Live the King!

This form of reciprocity can also be seen in the way the Torah views the role of the King. On the one hand, a Monarch is head and shoulders above his nation; on the other hand, our Sages declare "there is no king without a nation." It is the nation's acceptance of him as their monarch that empowers him to be king. The power of leadership, Chassidic thought asserts, is very

deeply rooted in one's soul and psyche. To elicit this power requires the devotion and commitment of the nation.

The relationship of a Rebbe and a Chosid has also been described in this manner. There is no chosid without total devotion to his Rebbe and there is no Rebbe without his Chassidim.

In a famous legal battle over ownership of the Schneerson library, the Rebbetzin (the Rebbe's wife) was asked to whom the library belonged. Did it belong to the Rebbe personally (and, as his private property, therefore subject to the civil laws of inheritance) or to the community of Chassidim? Her wise answer was: "Both the library and the Rebbe belong to the Chassidim."

This mutuality is even more pronounced in the leadership of Moshiach. The Rebbe explains that Moshiach's ability to lead us out of exile stems from our acceptance of his leadership. This we do by declaring "*Yechi Hamelech"* (the Biblical refrain that translates as "Long live the King") or any other

expression of our sincere desire for Moshiach to get us out of exile.

This notion that Moshiach's leadership hinges on us, the Rebbe states, is based on the teaching of the Ba'al Shem Tov that each and every Jew possesses a spark of Moshiach. When we allow that spark to ignite we empower Moshiach to actualize his leadership potential and finally take us out of exile and thereby usher in the Age of Redemption. May we see that imminently!

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

ESSAY FIFTEEN

WHITE IS NOT ALWAYS BEAUTIFUL

White symbolizes removing the façade to expose the underbelly of our personalities.

This can be either a cathartic or embarrassing experience, or both.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

ESSAY FIFTEEN

WHITE IS NOT ALWAYS BEAUTIFUL

Symptoms of Negativity

This week's Parsha deals with the laws concerning the skin disorder known as *tzara'as*. While there were definite physiological symptoms associated with this disease, our Sages note that it was essentially a spiritual malady. A person guilty of slandering others—an example highlighted by the Talmud—would be afflicted with this rare skin disorder.

It stands to reason that the symptoms of this disease are in some way symbolic of the spiritual denigration that caused the disease. One of the determining factors for the diagnosis of *tzara'as* was the whitening of the skin and its hair. The fact that the skin and hair turning white is indicative of impurity seems to contradict so many other references of our Torah concerning the color white.

Why White?

This begs a question. Doesn't the prophet equate white with the process of cleansing oneself from sin? Doesn't the Talmud relate that on Yom Kippur, in the days of the Temple, a red rope would miraculously turn white if the prayers of the Jewish people were accepted and they were forgiven for their sins? And don't we wear white on Yom Kippur because it symbolizes purity?

Why then does the Torah ascribe impurity to the **whitening** of the skin?

Some commentators suggest that it is related to the fact that when a person is embarrassed his or her face turns red and then white. Indeed, one of the Hebrew terms for embarrassment is *halbanas panim*, which translates literally as "whitening of the face."

One of the consequences of slander is that it causes embarrassment of the person about whom the slander is said. Thus the punishment for slander which causes the "whitening of someone's face" is that the slanderer's skin and hair turn white.

We must still understand why the color white

is employed, paradoxically, as a metaphor for both purity and impurity. In addition, we must try to comprehend why embarrassment is characterized by the "whitening" of the face rather than by the "reddening" of the face that precedes the whitening.

Baring one's Soul

Kabbalah teaches us that "white" represents the pristine essence of something. When an object, person, idea or emotion, is described as being white, it indicates that we have stripped that entity of its façade and its peripheral characteristics and exposed it for whatever it truly is.

When a Jew returns to G-d on Yom Kippur, he removes the cover that sullied his true pristine personality. At that point, we can say that he has exposed the "whiteness" of his soul, which is and has always been pure. In that context "white" is a positive and desirable outcome.

Conversely, when one embarrasses another, they essentially remove the cover, behind which the victim was able to hide his

negative traits. It is like stripping someone naked. Baring another's soul or "whitening his face" is the emotional equivalent of bloodshed. In this context, the color white is negative because it represents the removal of a person's defenses and renders them vulnerable.

And while baring one's soul can be a cathartic and positive exercise during Yom Kippur, or when it is designed to help a person deal with their faults, we must be extremely careful not to "whiten their face" by exposing their "nakedness" and render them vulnerable. Thus, when one demonstrated disregard for others' dignity and stripped them naked — "whitening their face" — it manifested itself in the whitening of the skin of the one who did the embarrassing.

Uncle Laban

We might now be able to shed some light on an enigmatic passage in the *Haggadah* that Laban — the father of the Matriarchs Rachel and Leah — "wanted to destroy everything."

Laban, Hebrew for "white," implies the desire harbored by evil people to remove the protective layers of our personalities that help us feel secure. When one is insecure and vulnerable, their entire existence is in jeopardy

Messianic Unmasking

One of the prophetic descriptions of the Messianic Age is: "Your Master shall no longer be cloaked in garments." The import of this statement is that G-d will "bare His soul," so to speak. Consequently, we will be able to get to the essence of G-d without any covers. We will also be given the parallel capacity to reveal **our** own full essence that is "white" and pure without making us vulnerable. Exposing the essence of our souls—which is now associated either with the extremes of Yom Kippur catharsis or with embarrassment and degradation—will then become a thoroughly positive experience at all times and in all circumstances.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

ESSAY SIXTEEN

JEWISH DEMOLITION CREW DISCOVERS TREASURE

We all possess hidden treasures. People in crisis mode often discover their hidden potential.

The goal is for people in non-crisis mode to discover the same.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

ESSAY SIXTEEN

JEWISH DEMOLITION CREW DISCOVERS TREASURE

The Miracle of Tzara'as

When was the last time your home was diagnosed with advanced leprosy? In Biblical times, not only were people afflicted with *tzara'a*s (usually translated as leprosy, but really a skin disorder that has no known modern counterpart), but also their garments and even their homes!

When a house exhibited signs of discoloration, it was declared *Tamei* (ritually unclean) by the *Kohain* and, in the most extreme of cases, the entire building had to be demolished.

According to Maimonides, these forms of "leprosy" were miraculous. They occurred only in the Biblical era. Furthermore, each of these abnormal changes of color and texture

was intended to send a message to the person who developed these symptoms on his/her body, clothing or house. The message was to change ones behavior.

Cause for Celebration

There is a difference, however, between "leprosy" of the body and garments and "leprosy" of the homes. When "leprosy" struck a Jewish home and it was demolished, it was not a punishment or tragedy for the homeowner. On the contrary, it was a cause for celebration.

According to the Midrash, when the Cana'anite tribes heard of Israel's impending arrival, they hid their treasures in the cavities of their walls. When the Jewish homeowner would subsequently demolish his house he would discover the hidden treasure.

Removing the Idolatrous Impurity

The Zohar, however, provides yet another insight as to why G-d would miraculously cause the discoloration of the home that

brought about its destruction. The Canaanite tribes were idolaters and a residual measure of impurity – generated by idol worship in these homes – remained.

Thus, when a Jew discovered the discoloration of his home ("leprosy") he knew that it was a Divine sign that his house retained the impurity of its former owners. He would then demolish the house and rebuild a home free of all spiritual "contaminants."

The Ba'al Teshuvah Paradox

It is remarkable that precisely those homes which retained the impurity and had to be demolished were the very homes which provided its owner with a treasure!

There are times when our behavior is good and routine. There are no major changes in our lives as we progress slowly up the ladder of spiritual perfection. There are no hidden skeletons and there are no major spiritual discoveries and surprises. In short, the person whose house, i.e., spiritual framework, is in

order – the *tzadik* – does not have the potential to find the most sublime treasure.

Only the *Ba'al Teshuvah*, the one who served masters other than G-d, who then demolishes that idolatrous structure, will discover the hidden treasures. Only the *Ba'al Teshuvah* who takes radical steps to change, unleashes untapped divine energy from within the very walls that housed his former idolatrous existence.

This is what our sages had in mind when they declared: "The place where the *Ba'al Teshuvah* stands, even the completely righteous cannot stand."

Messianic Teshuvah

And this pre-eminent quality of the *Ba'al Teshuvah* is what the Messianic Age will provide even for the *tzadik*.

In the words of our mystical sages:

> "Moshiach will lead even the righteous to *Teshuvah."*

Obviously, the concept of Teshuvah for the tzadik is not the same as it is for one who

had actually sinned. It does however mean that the tzadik will enjoy the non-incremental growth that a Baal teshuvah experiences when he or she jumps over all the hurdles and negative forces. Imagine running away form a wild beast chasing or a deadly fire. In these situations we can jump higher, rn faster and overcome other obstacles we could never have fathomed we could do. This is the way a Baal Teshuvah runs away from the threatening forces of impurity with which he had contact in the past.

The Tzadik does not have that same feeling because he is never in a position where he feels his spiritual life is in peril.

However, in the Messianic Age, even the tzadilk will be sable to perform all the spiritually athletic feats in the process of growing higher and higher.

Then, everyone will be able to uncover the most sublime treasures embedded within all parts of creation.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

PEAKS AND VALLEYS

The goal of reaching the peak requires that we know that we are now in a valley.

Each peak becomes the next valley, so that we continue to grow.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

ESSAY SEVENTEEN

PEAKS AND VALLEYS

Misunderstood

One of the most misunderstood concepts of Torah is the idea of *Tumah*, which is usually translated as "impurity" or "uncleanness," implying that somehow the person who "carries" this spirit of impurity is spiritually inferior.

This week's Parsha categorically dispels this erroneous understanding of the idea of *Tumah*. It begins with a description of the state of *Tumah* that applies to a woman who had given birth. For a week or two—depending on whether the offspring is a boy or a girl—the mother is designated as *tamei,* which translators render impure or unclean.

How can one explain how childbirth—the most phenomenal, glorious and divine life-experience—renders one unclean? And if one

would stubbornly argue that, indeed, the Torah does consider this woman spiritually inferior, it would lead to the ludicrous conclusion that it is undesirable to have children, since it is certainly undesirable to do something to render oneself spiritually degenerate. This absurd conclusion is easily dismissed when one realizes that the very first Biblical commandment is to be fruitful and multiply.

Now that we have concluded that *tumah* does not render an individual morally or spiritually repugnant or deficient, why then does the Torah use a term—*tumah* or *tamei*—for a woman after childbirth, a word that is also used pejoratively to describe people whose behavior is morally wanting.

The Uniqueness of the Holy Tongue

The answer lies in a better understanding of the Hebrew language, or more precisely, the Holy Tongue.. One word can even be used for concepts that are poles apart. But because they share some characteristics they can be identified by the same term.

For example: The word for bread "*lechem*" shares the same root as waging war "*lochem*." Would anyone suggest that baking or eating bread is an act of war?

One explanation for the connection between bread and war is that the process of producing bread involves a struggle that is metaphorically likened to a war. One must contend with the earth, till it, remove the thorns, etc. After the earth is "subdued" and is receptive to the sowing process, one must plant the grain, add the necessary nutrients and all the other processes that are involved in the production of bread—the symbol for all material goods. This is all regarded as a war in one very limited sense of the word.

Positive and Negative

Similarly, the word *tamei* is shared by someone who is physically unclean, morally deficient and by a person who goes through certain life experiences that are positive, as well.

Let me explain.

Life is a process that has its peaks and valleys. When a person reaches a high point, it is difficult to imagine that one can go even higher. Yet, life demands precisely that—that we never stay in one place. We must constantly strive for greater spiritual heights. To facilitate that, G-d designed His world with opportunities to grow by "compelling" us to backtrack.

In the physical realm, sleep is a prime example of this process. By forcing us to rest and desist from all of our accomplishments during the past day, we are able to not only maintain our previous high, but to grow beyond the achievements of the day before.

And yes, when a person awakens they are considered *tamei.* We therefore have a practice to wash our hands every morning as a way of recognizing that we went through a period where our energies were curtailed. Being mindful of the "valley" we were in, alerts us to the new challenge that we have today that compels us to rise to a higher peak than yesterday.

Likewise, when a woman has a child—

because it is the most heightened spiritual state a human being can experience naturally, the mother must experience a certain period of withdrawal, which enables her to meet the challenge of growing even beyond the peak of childbirth in future weeks and months.

We can now understand how the same word—*tamei*—can be used for a person who is morally depraved and a woman who has just given birth. In both cases—although for **opposite** reasons—the person who is so designated, experiences a lull, a pause, a sense that they have just descended into a valley. The salient difference, obviously, is that when a person commits a moral offense he has fallen to a low of his own volition, whereas the woman who gives birth was provided with this "low" by the Divine process of childbirth.

Exile: Divinely Ordained Low

All of our experience in exile is also a Divinely ordained low. Its purpose is not to keep us low, but to challenge us to reach even greater heights than we could have ever reached

when we had the Temple.

Conversely, we must remember that the purpose of the state of *tumah*, the lull that we have been experiencing for two thousand years, is for us to finally wake up and start a new dawn and a new day— the coming of Moshiach and the future Redemption.

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

THE POWER OF SPEECH

Humans are called Midabrim-speakers.

There is no more human quality and gift than the ability to communicate our ideas and feelings through speech.

We should use it wisely.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

ESSAY EIGHTEEN

THE POWER OF SPEECH

Checking our Speech

Whenever we read the Torah portion of *Tazria* and *Metzora* we are reminded of the power of speech. Our sages tell us that the form of skin disorder that the Torah describes — *tzara'as* — was not a natural condition. Despite the superficial resemblance to leprosy, *tzara'as* — as the Bible calls it — is simply not leprosy or any other skin disease known to modern medicine.

It was **not** contagious. The person stricken by this malady was not isolated, despite the presence of this disorder, unless a Kohain declared it as such. It would come and go and there was no treatment for it.

Our sages inform us that *tzara'as* was a reminder that he or she has spoken ill of another. By slandering another person we

create separation and discord between people. The slanderer who would "break out" would himself/herself be separated as a way of reminding him/her that words do hurt and cause separation among people.

This week's Torah portion is thus first-and-foremost a reminder for us to check our speech and refrain from slanderous talk.

The power of speech is usually portrayed in the following manner: One says something in confidence to a friend, almost immediately it is transmitted to others, who, in turn, pass it on — with additional tidbits — to yet others. In just a brief period, an entire community can be accepting rumors about one of their members. This can obviously lead to the destruction of the reputation of that person and destroy his or her entire life.

The Mystical Power of Lashon Hara

Chassidic thought delves even more deeply into the power of *lashon hara* - evil speech and derives a lesson about *lashon tov* - positive speech as well.

Speech, the Ba'al Shem Tov teaches us, has the power to reveal. Speech is a G-d given instrument to humans with which they can express their thoughts and feelings in ways that cannot be expressed otherwise.

When a person says "I love you" it is so much more powerful and meaningful than just thinking words of love or even embracing the other. When we verbally confess our sins it reveals a deeper sense of contrition than if we had just thought those same words.

Speech has the power to expose some of the deepest resources that we were not even privy to before we vocalized those ideas or sentiments.

When we **speak** about another person's moral weaknesses, we cause these weaknesses to be exaggerated and brought closer to the surface. Faults that were mostly beneath the surface suddenly become manifest. If one had not spoken ill of the other, the other could have managed that evil. Now that it is out in the open it can become unmanageable.

Speaking ill of another person, thus, has the capacity to actualize that person's

shortcomings, which can lead to that person's spiritual degradation.

Positive Speech

If this is true with regard to the negative sphere of speech, it is certainly valid with regard to one who speaks positively of another. By speaking about and focusing on a specific quality that another individual possess in small measure, that quality actually becomes magnified and is given the ability to become his/her dominant characteristic.. Positive speech in and of itself has a positive effect on others.

Enlisting Thought, Action and Speech for Moshiach

For thousands of years Jews have been yearning for the Messianic Age. Yet, yearning alone is not sufficient. It is the actions that we do that change the world and make it the "dwelling place" G-d had sought from the beginning of time.

In addition to the yearning (thought) and the

actions (deed) that are crucial for the Redemption, it is also crucial that we articulate our desire for the Redemption (speech) . Expressions such as "Ad Masai-how much longer" (a Biblical expression), when verbalized, actually have the power to elicit the Redemptive powers that are hidden beneath the surface. For Redemption is not something that we create; it is something that exists in potentia, waiting for the beckoning call for it to appear in all its glory.

This week should thus be dedicated to the evocation of positive energies by speaking about the good in everyone and everything. This includes the hidden powers of Redemption that are contained within each and every one of us that awaits our powerful words of faith and prayer to make it a complete reality.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

ESSAY NINETEEN

FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Freedom is a concept and experience that exists on many levels.

One that is highlighted by Passover is the freedom of speech

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

ESSAY NINETEEN

FREEDOM OF SPEECH

The Seder Highlight

Pesach, our sages tell us, is more than just a commemoration of an **ancient** people's drive for independence saga. One of the salient themes of the Seder is the need to feel as if **we** are actually the ones who are going through this liberation process. Quoting the Mishnah, the author of the Haggadah (the text recited at the Seder) states:

> "In every generation, every individual is obligated to see himself as if he had left Egypt."

The manner by which we attempt to experience our own liberation is primarily through the recitation of the Haggadah – by way of telling. Of course, there is a need to eat matzah and Moror (bitter herbs), but the most important feature of the Seder, around

which everything else revolves, is the verbal part: simply telling the story.

Pesach: The Mouth Speaks

According to the Ari, the great Kabbalist of the sixteenth century, the very word Pesach alludes to the significance of speech in relation to the forces of liberation. The word Pesach is a composite of two words: *peh* (mouth) *sach* (speaks).

Chassidic thought explains the words of the Ari in the following manner:

Before the Exodus, the Jews were not only in physical bondage, but their power of speech was also impaired. Speech has the capacity to express one's innermost and most powerful intellectual and emotional abilities. When speech is not free, the entire person is likewise not free.

The Jewish people were so crushed that they could not fully express themselves. All they could do was to cry out to G-d. Their faculty of speech was thus also in exile.

There are many tragic stories of Holocaust survivors who could not talk about their experiences. It was all bottled up in them and caused their pain to continue. The moment they could open up and express their feelings, the more liberated they were able to feel.

Reflection of G-d's Speech

The faculty of speech that we possess is a reflection of G-d's faculty of speech with which He created the Heaven and Earth. When the Jews were enslaved in Egypt, G-d's "speech," as it were, was also concealed and in exile. This means that G-d's creative power, the words through which He creates the world, were hidden.

When one looks around and sees only natural phenomena, failing to see the Divine creative power that is the true animating force of all existence, it could be said that G-d's faculty off speech is in exile and in need of being liberated.

Pesach, with all of the miracles that clearly demonstrated to the Egyptians and the world, that there is a Creator who is in total control

of the universe, is the holiday of liberation for G-d as well! With Passover, G-d's speech (read: His creative powers and overt involvement in the world) was beginning to express itself.

Passover is thus when both G-d and the Jewish people experience true freedom of speech; freedom of expression.

Two Forms of Speech

But, there are two forms of speech. The theme of this past week's Torah portion, Metzora is named after a person whose unbridled negative speech, leads to the development of a skin disorder known as *tzara'as* (discussed in many of the preceding essays).

The word Metzora, is a composite of two words: *Motzi Ra*, one who elicits and expresses evil.

Speech – good or bad – has the capacity to express the hidden qualities of either goodness or evil.

Pharaoh-*Peh Ra*: The Evil Mouth

When one speaks of another person's faults, it has the capacity to elicit these faults and make them more pronounced. This too is a liberation process – albeit, a negative on. It liberates the negative energies that may have remained locked up within the individual.

This form of liberation, however, is the very antithesis of Pesach. It is identified with the process of Pharaoh, which Kabbalists say is also a composite of the two Hebrew words: *Peh Ra*, the mouth of evil, or the force that elicits the hidden evil.

Pe-sach, thus, represents the emergence of the power of positive speech. When we speak of the Exodus, we elicit the forces that bring about the liberation of our own Divine potential and the Divine potential of the entire world.

Next year in Jerusalem!

At the end of the Seder we declare: Next year in Jerusalem! This is more than just a prayerful wish for the end of exile and return

to Jerusalem. The very exercise of telling the story of liberation is what brings about our own individual liberation as well as the liberation of the Jewish people and the entire world from exile.

At that time G-d's "speech" will resonate clearly throughout the world

ESSAY TWENTY

DR. COHEN THE DERMATOLOGIST

Stagnation is the source of many of our emotional and spiritual maladies.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

ESSAY TWENTY

DR. COHEN THE DERMATOLOGIST

The Largest Organ

Medical science teaches us that skin is the largest organ of the human body. And it is about skin that the Torah devotes nearly two entire portions (*parshiyos)* that we will read this Shabbos, entitled: *Tazria* and *Metzora.* This is how the Torah introduces the laws concerning a skin disorder that would render the person ritually unclean:

> "If a person (*Adam*) has on the skin of his body: *s'eis*– a (white) blotch, *sapachas*—a creamy blotch, or *baheres*—a (bright) spot, and it forms a (suspected) lesion of *Tzara'as* on the skin of his body, he should be brought to Aaron the priest, or to one of his sons, the priests (for examination)."

The Torah then proceeds to state that if the priest declares the person to be ritually unclean he must be segregated from the community until he recovers. Upon recovery, the Torah prescribes a ritual of sacrifices that effect the complete purification of the afflicted person and his or her return to the community.

Adam, Not Ish

The word employed here by the Torah for person is *Adam*. Generally, the Torah uses the less formal term *ish,* to denote a man, or *isha* for a woman. When the Torah employs the more sophisticated term of *Adam* it indicates that we are dealing with a spiritually sophisticated individual. This suggests that the affliction of *tzara'as* is one that affects primarily people who are on a spiritually heightened plane.

To prove this point one could refer to how even Moses and his sister Miriam, the two greatest leaders of the Jewish people of all times, were afflicted with *tzara'as*. Furthermore, the Talmud applies the

appellation of *Metzora*—the person afflicted with this skin disorder—to none other than Moshiach himself! Obviously, the state of *tzara'as* can afflict even, (nay, especially) the most spiritual of people.

The question that should be raised here is how can we explain the phenomenon of *tzara'as* applying to people of such high caliber?

Stagnation

One answer provided by the *Ba'al Shem Tov*'s grandson in his classic work *Degel Machaneh Efraim*, cites the three forms of *tzara'as* enumerated in the beginning of this week's parsha mentioned earlier: *s'eis*– a (white) blotch, *sapachas*—a creamy blotch, or *baheres*—a (bright) spot." These three skin disorders describe the three circumstances that cause a temporary lull in an otherwise spiritual person's life of holiness and constant growth.

The first condition that afflicts advanced people is the attainment of such heights that they feel that they cannot grow anymore—

they reached a plateau. Frequently, spiritually charged people will discover that they have lost their ardor and enthusiasm. And even not-so-holy individuals discover that their moments of inspiration are usually followed by moments of lethargy, disinterest and even indifference. Why can't a person remain on a high note?

The reason for this word is hinted in the name of the first disorder, *s'eis* which is related to a Hebrew word that means to rise. The spiritual impasse that one can experience was designed by the A-mighty Himself to enable a person who lost his spiritual momentum to start climbing again.

By standing still and feeling the inability to grow any further and even by losing some of the gains we have made previously, we are pushed and propelled to start the climb to greater heights once more. When we experience this loss of holiness and cry out to G-d, in the words of the Psalmist: "My G-d, my G-d, why have you forsaken me?" G-d will ultimately respond to our pleas by enabling us to climb even higher and higher.

Environmental Causes

There is a second factor in an otherwise spiritually advanced individual's stagnation that is caused by one's environment. One can be held back by the lack of support, or through the outright disruptive efforts of others. This is alluded to in the second form of *tzara'as* known as *sapachas*, which can be translated as "associations." There are countless stories of otherwise conscientious individuals whose enthusiasm was dampened by others.

Now while the first factor that contributes to spiritual stagnation is internal and psychological, and the second factor is external, coming from one's peers, there is a third factor that is caused by one's students.

Tuning Out

This third impediment to continued spiritual growth is experienced when the intended recipients of one's knowledge "tune out" because the master's teachings are abstruse and beyond the capacity of the students to grasp and relate to. This superior level of

knowledge is alluded to in the name of the third form of *tzara'as*, *baheres,* which means radiant or (a blinding) luminescence. Not having anyone on whom to shine ours light and shower our fountains of knowledge, can cause these very fountains of knowledge to dry up.

The Ultimate Dermatologist

To deal with any of these three causes of spiritual stagnation one must go to Aaron, the man who personified the trait of kindness. One must have a spiritual mentor, who is imbued with the spirit of love and compassion, who will help us uncover the root causes of our spiritual stagnation and provide the mechanism to break out of it.

As noted, our Sages refer to Moshiach as a *Metzora.* This could mean that part of the process of Moshiach involves recognizing and treating the spiritual malaise that affects even and particularly the more elite spiritual people. Indeed, Moshiach will guide and show us how to deal with the spiritual maladies that are represented by the three forms of

skin disorders. Moshiach, in effect, is the ultimate dermatologist that will cure all of the spiritual skin diseases that serve as barriers to the person experiencing his full potential.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

SKIN CARE

The myth in our society is that the exterior is either the most important thing or the least important.

Materialists delight in the external; spiritualists shun it.

Judaism realizes the infinite power that lies in every thought, word or deed.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

ESSAY TWENTY-ONE

SKIN CARE

"Biblical dermatology"

"Biblical dermatology" is probably one of the ways we can characterize the content of this week's Parsha. This parsha describes the various skin disorders called *tzara'as* ,that, when identified by the Kohain (priest), it renders the person with the disorder ritually unclean. The person would then be quarantined until the skin disorder would disappear. To be sure, as our sages emphasize, tzara'as was not simply a physical malady. It was a product of a spiritual disorder and imperfection that would manifest itself in a physical form.

It is remarkable that the Torah devotes so much attention to this skin disease. There is no other type of disease to which the Torah

devotes so much attention. What lesson does the Torah's preoccupation with *tzara'as* convey to us?

Our sages instruct us that the condition of *Tzara'as* was a punishment for the speaking of *Lashon hara*, or slander. The connection between the two is given by our sages in the following way: Just as the one who slandered another sought to isolate him from his friends, so too will the slanderer now have to be quarantined and be isolated from his friends.

Why a Skin Disease?

One is entitled to ask, why did G-d have to afflict the slanderer with a skin disease? G-d could have chosen other diseases where the Torah could have required one to be quarantined? This suggests that there is an intrinsic connection between a skin disorder and the utterance of negative words against another.

Dermatologists tell us that their field of medicine is the most important, because it is through one's skin that all outside influences

enter the body. Likewise, the secret of Jewish health can be traced to the way we deal with our skin, or what appears to be the surface part of our personalities.

Skin is the garment that clothes the person's skeletal, circulatory, nervous systems, vital organs etc.. But, it is the skin that shields these essential components of our bodies and provides them with their nourishment. Moreover, it is the skin that is what directly interacts with the outside world.

While it is our brain and heart that identifies who we are and defines our very existence, our skin can not be ignored or neglected.

Our intellect, knowledge, feelings, vision, aspirations, courage and commitments are easily recognized as the essential components of our souls. One does not have to be told to care for them and to develop them, because without these components we have no identity or purpose in life.

The Peripheral is not insignificant

On the other hand, when it comes to a

fleeting thought or a capricious word, we think nothing of it. After all, even if one thinks an undesirable thought or makes a misguided statement, we may think that it is not of major consequence. Of what value does a thought or word have in relation to the totality of our being? We could not imagine how our spiritual health could be compromised by a stray word or thought.

We can now understand why the punishment for slander is the skin disorder, because they share a basic feature. Both skin and words are peripheral, but both of them can affect our whole being; skin in the physical way and undesirable words in a spiritual way. What skin is to our bodies, thought and speech — our soul's garments — are to our souls. Every word and thought that is undesirable pollutes the internal organs of our souls; they degrade us and distance us from our soul's spirituality and from others.

Moshiach a Metzora?

Our Sages tell us that the Moshiach is likened to a person afflicted with *tzara'as,* the skin

disorder.

This does not mean to suggest that the Messiah must be one who is lax with his speech about others. On the contrary, it is meant to suggest that Moshiach's role is to focus attention on what many people view as peripheral to Judaism.

Moshiach is one who will emphasize the importance of every single thought, word or action.

Moshiach's role, among other things, is to underscore the infinite power that every mitzvah possesses.

Moshiach will demonstrate to us the importance of spiritual skin care that will make us worthy of redemption.

For, indeed, as Maimonides declares, even one isolated deed can alter the balance between good and evil and tip the scales in favor of the world realizing its redemption — the Messianic Age.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

ESSAY TWENTY-TWO

A TALE OF TWO BIRDS

There has always been tension between the forces of unity and the forces of separation.

Unity with some separation is anarchy.

Separation without unity is war.

Judaism asserts the need for both.

These complementary forces will be fused together through Moshiach.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

ESSAY TWENTY-TWO

A TALE OF TWO BIRDS

Dismiss the slander and Embrace the words of Torah

This week's parsha *Metzora*, discusses the purification process a person afflicted with the skin disorder known as *tzara'as* would have to undergo. The *Metzora* — the person with the skin disease described in last week's parsha — would use two birds for his purification. The first bird would be sacrificed and the second bird would be sent away. What is the significance of the two birds and why were they treated differently.

Among the "simple" explanations Biblical commentators offer is the one based on the notion that the purification process was atonement for the sin of *lashon hara*, slander. As was mentioned in previous essays our Sages considered this skin disease to be a

punishment for the abuse of one's power of speech.

To atone for this abuse, one must do **two** things:

Firstly, one must cease speaking ill of another. This process is represented by the bird that is slaughtered. According to the Midrash, the bird symbolizes the power of speech, inasmuch as birds are always singing. Thus, slaughtering the bird symbolizes ceasing to speak evil.

But, mere silence is not enough. One must learn how to speak properly; by using one's power of speech for the study of Torah and other positive pursuits.

Hence, the second bird was not slaughtered but sent away. This symbolizes the idea that one must take one's power of speech and divert (send it away) it to a new area; an area of life that is associated with the Torah, the very source of life.

Symbol of Peace

On a deeper level, the bird symbolizes the concept of peace. The word for bird — *tzippor* — is numerically the same as the word for peace — shalom. Furthermore, the Talmud states that one who dreams of a bird should anticipate peace. The *Metzora*, by his evil speech caused the separation of one person from another, the very opposite of peace. Hence, in the *Metzora's* attempt at rectifying his errant behavior, he must bring a bird, which symbolizes peace.

But, why two birds? And why is one bird destroyed and the other sent away?

Removal of Barriers, Good or Bad?

This is to teach us that there are two forms of peace represented by the two different birds. Peace is created when the barriers that exist between two entities are removed. Interestingly, the letters of the word for bird in Hebrew, *tzippor,* when rearranged, form the name *Peretz*, which has the connotation of breaking through barriers. When two people cannot get along with each other

because there are barriers that separate between them, the process of peace is achieved by removing those obstacles. This process is symbolized by sending away the bird and allowing it to go free.

There are times, places and situations where the process of removing barriers is unhealthy. The obligation to respect another's privacy is as sacred an obligation as the obligation to reach out to another and remove the separation that may exist between them. To quote King Solomon,

> "There is a time to embrace and there is a time to distance the embrace."

Separation for a Peaceful Marriage

Even within a marriage, which is the most formidable example of peace and unity, there is a Torah mandated period when husband and wife are to be physically separated, allowing each to "have their own space." The idea of necessary divisions is also reflected in the separate roles for the Kohain, the Levi and Israelites, mandated by the Torah.

To symbolize the need to establish some barriers even as we remove others, the Torah tell us that one bird (the symbol of the breaking down of barriers) was slaughtered and the other was set free.

The Great Shabbos

It Is by Divine Providence that we read the story of the two birds on the Shabbos that precedes Passover. This Shabbos is also known as *Shabbos Hagadol*, or the great Shabbos, because of a great miracle that occurred on this Shabbos prior to the Exodus from Egypt.

The process of redemption is also referred to as a time when barriers are removed. Thus Moshiach who will usher in the future Redemption is referred to as *Ben Partzi*-the Son of *Peretz*," or "the one who will break through barriers" that will usher in the age of universal peace.

Standards will Remain

However, even as Moshiach will remove barriers between people as well as the barriers that exist between ourselves and G-d, he will not do so at the expense of the standards that were established by the Torah.

The separation between the weekdays and the Shabbos, light and darkness, for example, will never be compromised. Moshiach will struggle to maintain these standards and values that might be viewed as barriers, but he will simultaneously remove all the obstacles and barriers that separate us from one another and from our Father in heaven.

Moshiach will also strengthen Judaism by repairing all the breaches in the walls of separation established by the Torah (See Rambam, Hilchos Melachim chapter 11) and the same Moshiach will proclaim and usher in the age of ultimate peace removing all the unnecessary barriers that stand in the way of peace.

ESSAY TWENTY-THREE

ARE YOU TRULY POOR?

Before claiming poverty we should reflect on the true nature of wealth and how we are so blessed.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

ESSAY TWENTY-THREE

ARE YOU TRULY POOR?

Sliding Scale

This week's parsha discusses the manner through which a person who is afflicted with a skin disease is purified. The Torah considers this very unique skin disease to be more than a dermatological problem; it is a moral and spiritual one. According to the Talmud this form of affliction known as *tzara'as* came as a result of lashon hara or the evil tongue; i.e., for one who has spoken ill of another.

After the person so afflicted recovers he or she must bring several offering to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. With regard to some of the offerings the Torah provides two standards; a more elaborate offering for those

who could afford it and a less expensive offering for those who are poor.

Redundancy

When the Torah introduces the offering for the poor it appears to use two synonymous expressions:

> "If he is poor and he cannot afford (the above offerings; literally: "his hands do not reach") he should take..."

Commentators raise the question of redundancy in this verse. Why does it say both "if he is poor" and "he cannot afford." The Torah could have stated one or the other. Why the repetition?

Two Forms of Poverty

One commentator answers by pointing to two scenarios wherein a person could either be poor yet he can afford to bring the more elaborate offering, and conversely a situation where he is not poor but he can still not afford. And in both cases the Torah does not

give the atoning afflicted person "get away" with the meager offering.

There are people who are not poor but they can still not afford to spend much: For example, a wealthy person who is on the road and has no available cash (they also left their credit cards home).

That individual, while clearly not poor, cannot afford to buy anything at that time and place. According to Jewish law He or she is therefore entitled to even collect from the tithes intended for the poor because at that time and place he or she cannot afford to buy anything on which to subsist. This describes the person who is not poor but is temporarily strapped for cash. Nevertheless, he or she is not entitled to bring the less expensive offering.

These individuals can wait until they can access their fortune to purchase the more elaborate offering. It would not be proper for them to procure atonement by making an offering inconsistent with their means. And while the Torah allows them to be beneficiaries of charity to enable them to get

through their temporary financial crisis, they cannot use the poor man's offering that has as its goal the transformation of a person's character and moral compass. They need to do more and they must wait until they can access their fortune so they can do more.

Conversely, it is possible for a person to be legally poor but still afford to purchase the more expensive offering. There are two such scenarios mentioned by commentators:

The first scenario is when a wealthy person dispossesses himself of his or her fortune by declaring everything they own to be *hefker*, free for all to take. A person might do that as an extreme form of penance or a way of showing their magnanimity. Of course, this radical approach to penance is not encouraged in Jewish sources, but if it should occur, the question would arise whether that person is permitted to bring the poor man's meager offering. And the answer is no. Though this individual is penniless and poor, he can still reclaim all his possessions by simply being the first person to lay claim to the ownerless property.

So, while this individual who dispossessed himself is now legally poor, his or her hands can, figuratively and literally, reach out and seize the ownerless possessions before anyone else would do so. Indeed, he or she would be encouraged to reclaim these possessions, for, as stated, there is no Mitzvah for a person to become poor as a means to procure G-d's good will. While Judaism clearly encourages giving more charity when there is a spiritual need for it, it is a far cry from rendering oneself a pauper who will ultimately depend on others for handouts.

"Hands can Reach"

Another example of one who is poor but whose "hands can reach" the necessary funds is one who has friends from whom he can borrow the money to purchase a higher priced offering. Assuming that he or she will eventually be able to repay the loan, this person is not entitled to make due with an inferior standard of offering. While they qualify as poor they have the ability to find

the necessary funds. The funds are within reach.

In order for a person to be so destitute as to entitle them to bringing a relatively meager offering they must be both poor (this excludes the tycoon who left his credit cards and cash a thousand miles from home) and incapable of gaining access to money (this excludes the poor person who has the ability to acquire the money by borrowing it or the like).

True Poverty

The Talmud states: "There is no poor person except one who is poor in knowledge." And, therefore, what has been said above about the offering of the poor is true about the intellectually and spiritually challenged person as well.

Some people have scant knowledge of the teachings of Torah as to how we must think and behave but they are not poor if they have the means to learn. The excuse of ignorance cannot be invoked if we have the opportunity to reach out and access the knowledge.

Likewise, one who experiences a temporary lapse of spiritual and moral knowledge, leaving his or her moral compass at home, cannot use the poverty defense as a justification for improper behavior. The only way we can truly atone for our shortcomings is to recognize that while we may seem poor we are truly not as poor as we might think. We can either draw on our own treasury of inner knowledge or access it from the outside from those who would readily lend it to us.

Exile Poverty

However, due to the painful and long exile, many within the Jewish people have degenerated to the state of true poverty. They lost touch with their rich heritage and are situated in places and circumstances where this knowledge is also inaccessible to them. They are truly poor. They can avail themselves of the special poor person's offering until such time when they reclaim their heritage.

The above might explain why the Moshiach, the leader that will usher in the Messianic

Age of spiritual wealth, is referred to Biblically as a "poor man." Perhaps, it is the Torah's way of saying that one of Moshiach's tasks will be to reach out to the truly impoverished souls and restore them to their rich heirloom and heritage.

ESSAY TWENTY-FOUR

LIKE A LESION

There are some who are not sensitive to subtle language when they should.

There are others who are too careful even when their words can be misconstrued.

Our verbal challenge is to know when to use pure language and when to use language purely.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

ESSAY TWENTY-FOUR

LIKE A LESION

Indirect!

One of the strangest phenomena the Torah records is the one discussed in this week's parsha concerning a house that was afflicted with *tza'ra'as* (incorrectly translated as leprosy), a form of lesion that affected people's bodies, clothing and even their homes.

Upon discovering this "disease," which was the appearance of a lesion-like discoloration of the stones of the house, he would call a Kohain (priest) to determine whether it was truly afflicted with tza'ra'at. If that was the case, the Torah prescribes a process of purification.

The Torah states that the house owner should inform the priest that "There appears

to me to be something **like** a lesion in the house."

Rashi takes note of the indirect way of presenting his discovery of a lesion to the Kohain. Instead of saying "There is a lesion in my house," he states "There appears to me something **like** a lesion in the house." This is to teach us, Rashi explains, that even if the person was a scholar and well versed in the laws of lesions, nevertheless he should never state categorically that he saw a lesion. He must wait for the priest to come, examine it, and declare it to be lesion.

The question can be raised why is it wrong for the owner of the house to state unambiguously that he saw a lesion if that is indeed what he saw. Why the added qualifier "like"?

Language Sensitivity

One simple answer is that the entire phenomenon of tzara'as, our Sages tell us, was a reaction to lashon hara. Lashan hara is usually translated as slander or gossip, or simply speaking ill of others. However, a

broader way of rendering this phrase is: bad use of language. Obviously, the worst violation of poor or bad use of language is when we use it to hurt others, but it is not restricted to that extreme form of abuse. To counter lashon hara one must not only avoid speaking ill of others but they must also use the most refined and elegant way of speaking.

Speech Makes us Human

To explain: The greatest gift G-d has given us—and the gift upon which all the other gifts are founded—is our humanity, and the most pronounced expression of our humanity is our ability to communicate through speech.

Indeed, when dividing all levels of existence into the four categories of: the inanimate, vegetation, animals and humans, the term used to describe humans is "*midaber*-a talker." The power of speech is the most profound expression of our humanity.

One way of understanding why speech and not intelligence is the hallmark of humanity is to understand the essence of speech. Animals

also communicate, but human speech is unique.

There are three ways through which we express our ideas and feelings: thought, speech and action:

Thought is personal and intimate. When we think we are communicating to ourselves.

Action, on the other hand is external to us. And while action is also a form of self-expression and communication to the outside it represents that part of us that becomes detached from us. Action is our ability to impact and effect the world outside of us. This trait an animal also possesses.

The Bridge

Speech is the bridge between the two worlds of self and the other. When a person speaks, others can hear and be part of your thought process, unlike thought. But, speech is also unlike action where the person's intimate involvement is not detected by the outside. When a person speaks their feelings are clearly expressed. The verse "his soul leaves

him as he speaks," expresses how profound speech is. Speech is thus truly a Divine power that enables us to express the innermost sentiments to the outside.

Breach of Trust

This ability to relate to others one's most intimate feelings is a gift that G-d gave to humans. Therefore, when one takes this exquisite gift and uses it poorly, it is a serious breach of trust. It is comparable to one who takes a piece of jewelry given as a wedding gift and uses it to remove filth.

It goes without saying that we should avoid using profanities and vulgar language. Jewish tradition also encourages the use of euphemisms to avoid the use of negative language. Great and holy rabbis would even avoid using the word death or evil. Instead they would use the awkward expression: "the opposite of life," or the "opposite of good," whenever the message would not be misunderstood.

To the "outsider" this might seems unnecessary and even frivolous and extreme.

However, it is the extreme form of sensitivity that we apply to speech that helps us to become more refined in all the other areas of life. Of course, it is self-understood that one cannot used refined language and behave in an unrefined way. Or as a rabbi once remarked to the person who complained that so and so called him a rather "colorfully" negative name: "To be it is all right, just to say it is wrong?"

In addition to the fact that speech is a rare Divine gift, speech also has the capacity to unlock hidden aspects of our personalities. Kabbalah teaches us that positive speech can make the latent positive energies surface, while negative speech can do the same with regard to hidden or suppressed negative energies.

Clarity Trumps Sensitivity

We can now understand why the Torah does not want the owner of the house to state categorically that he saw a lesion in his house; yet the Kohain must make that declaration.

According to Jewish law, only the Kohain can declare the house unclean and subject it to the process of purification. Thus, the Kohain must state clearly that there is a lesion and the house is unclean. He cannot use euphemisms or vague statements.

Clarity about matters of law and behavior override the importance of refined and positive language. If we see a child running into the street, we do not use euphemistic language. We must shout and say what it takes to stop the child. The person who hesitates in that type of a situation to find the "proper" words deserves the Talmudic label: "Chasid Shoteh-A pious idiot."

Three Reasons for Indirectness

But the owner of the house, whose declaration has no effect, anyhow, must be more sensitive than others to not state categorically that there is a lesion. And this so for several reasons:

First, the very phenomenon of tzara'as was a reaction to the malevolent use of speech. Surely, when one goes through the process of

cleansing oneself from the improper use of speech, they must be more conscientious than the average person in selecting a less negative way of articulating their thoughts.

Second, since negative language can actually activate dormant negative energy, this individual—whose declaration has no therapeutic value—would only be activating and strengthening his weaknesses by stating the negative so blatantly.

Only the Kohain who functions as the spiritual surgeon, and the person who is identified with the trait of kindness, must be blunt in his declaration so that he can "surgically" remove the negative influences from the person who was afflicted with tzara'as.

Third, just as there is a prohibition against speaking ill of others, one should not disparage oneself needlessly.

Some people have a tendency to be very harsh on themselves, thinking that it is good to be self-deprecating and humble. In the pursuit of the noble trait of humility, some will actually grossly exaggerate their own

deficiencies and cause themselves harm in the process.

On the other hand, it is crucial that we do not overlook our faults. If we see a "lesion" developing we must do something about it.

By using the term "like" a lesion, the owner of the house satisfies both demands. He is conscious of his potential spiritual malady (of which the lesion was a physical manifestation) and is taking action to deal with it, while at the same time not jumping to conclusions and exaggerating the extent of the malady.

Sensitive Time

We are living in the most sensitive time of history. As we have stated repeatedly in so many of our weekly messages that we are standing on the threshold of the future Redemption. In this precarious position—it's not easy to stand on a threshold for too long—our "house," figuratively speaking, seems to us to be afflicted with serious lesions.

The Torah therefore exhorts us not to be too harsh in our own self-condemnation. To be sure, we must take notice of our "lesions" and deal with them. But, we should not put ourselves down. We are not bad people despite the fact that our faults appear to be faults. But we ought never to become hysterical in our own self-judgment.

In addition, our Sages tell us that the way to correct the negative forms of speech is to engage in positive forms of speech. See the good in yourself and others. Be generous with your praise of others. And finally, we should spend more time utilizing our Divine gift of speech for the study of Torah and recitation of the Psalms in particular.

All this positive energy that we will generate through all of the positive speech (as well as thought and action) will finally help to push us off the "threshold" of Redemption into the Redemption itself.

ESSAY TWENTY-FIVE

EYES ON THE GOAL

The Torah teaches us to follow three tracks.

The first track is to take each day, opportunity and Mitzvah at a time. Focus on the immediate challenge.

The second track is to set goals for our spiritual development.

The third and ultimate track is to "help" G-d realize His goal!

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

ESSAY TWENTY-FIVE

EYES ON THE GOAL

Get the Earthenware Vessels Out!

One of the most bizarre phenomena recorded in the Torah is "lesions of the house," described in this week's parsha. In addition to the skin and garment lesions discussed earlier in the Torah, the Torah here addresses the ritual impurity of house lesions. These lesions, as our Sages taught, were intended to signal us that all was not well morally and spiritually.

The Torah delineates the proper procedure for identifying these lesions and how one goes about purifying the home from them.

Prior to declaring the home *tamei,* ritually off limits to its inhabitants, its owner summons a kohain-priest to determine whether the home is *tamei:*

> "The owner of the house should inform the priest saying, 'There

> apppears to me to be something like a (*tzara'as*) lesion in (my) house.'"

Upon the priest's instructions, they should clear out the house before the priest comes to inspect the lesion, so that every vessel in the house should not become ritually impure."

Rashi explains that the concern was not for the food that would become impure, because impure food may be eaten by a person while he himself is in a state of ritual impurity. The concern was also not for most vessels because they can be immersed and purified in a Mikveh. Rather, the Torah here was concerned specifically with earthenware vessels that cannot be purified in a Mikveh.

The commentator *Sifsei Chachamim* raises the obvious question: What is the difference between earthenware vessels and the food they contain? Just as impure food may be eaten when a person is ritually impure and will not therefore go to waste, so too, one may use earthenware utensils when he is in a state of ritual impurity. Why the concern for the earthenware *vessels*?

The Obsessions of the Righteous

One may answer this question by referring to an intriguing statement in the Talmud (*Chullin* 91a) regarding righteous peoples' obsession with their belongings. For example, the Patriarch Jacob risked his life to retrieve a few small vessels when he was approaching his brother Esau.

How could a person whose focus is on the spiritual be so concerned about material possessions?

The answer given in Chassidic literature is that, appearances aside, their concern was not for the material or financial loss they might incur if their possessions were not protected, but for the lost opportunity to fulfill their mission vis-à-vis their possessions.

The underlying philosophy behind this obsession is that G-d gives us possessions to use, and thereby harness them, in our service to G-d. To neglect one of our possessions and allow it to be lost represents a lost opportunity. Moreover, that small part of creation will be denied its potential to be refined, elevated and transformed into an

integral component of G-d's dwelling place here on Earth.

This transformative goal, according to the Midrash as emphasized and elucidated in Chassidic thought, is the very reason G-d created the world. G-d created a world in which His presence is concealed and we must, through our observance of the Mitzvos, "reintroduce" G-d into our consciousness and into the physical world. Towards this end, every part of the physical world is crucial and when G-d entrusts us with possessions we must not deny them their opportunity to become receptive to the Divine.

Palace Minus One Brick

One can liken this to a king who commissions his subjects to build him a magnificent palace and provides them with all of the building materials needed. However, one of the builders decides to cut corners and leaves out one of the bricks. Compared to the entire massive structure the absence of one brick is hardly noticeable. Nevertheless, it is not fitting for a king to have a palace that

is incomplete. In a certain sense, the absence of one brick is comparable to the absence of an entire wall because from the vantage point of its owner, the king does not have the palace he desired and cannot move into it until he is fully satisfied that every small detail is in order.

The analogue for this parable is that we too have been commissioned by the Divine Contractor to construct His palace and fulfill His desire to have our physical world transformed into His dwelling place. From G-d's vantage point, it makes no difference how apparently trivial a certain component of that palace may be. Even if one small part of the resources that were entrusted to us are not part of this effort, G-d's palace will remain deficient and His desire for creation will go unfulfilled.

Two Tracks

To be sure, this does not mean that if we miss an opportunity to do a Mitzvah with one of our physical objects it will render everything else we did valueless. This attitude

of all or nothing is foreign to Judaism. Particularly, as we know from Chassidic teaching, G-d cherishes and treasures each and every small gesture. Every solitary Mitzvah stands on its own. To get one Jew to do one Mitzvah generates infinite Divine energy.

There is no such thing as an insignificant Mitzvah, just as there is no such thing as an insignificant Jew. If one Jew had been missing from the foot of Mount Sinai when G-d gave us the Torah, then the Torah would not have been given! Every individual counts and every individual positive act has an inestimable value.

However, when we discuss our mission we must discern between two possible tracks. We must discern between what we accomplish in terms of our own spiritual agenda and that which we do to fulfill G-d's overarching plan for this world.

While many will focus on their personal spiritual life, the truly and perfectly righteous focus on G-d's plan. Indeed, the Alter Rebbe in his classic work, the Tanya, describes the

role of the Tzadik, also known as the *Bnei Aliyah*, as those whose concern is with G-d's agenda to have a dwelling place in this world. The importance of their personal agenda and spiritual journey is secondary to their desire to fulfill G-d's agenda and facilitate His "journey" into this world.

Missing an Opportunity

We can now understand why the Torah was so concerned with the possibility of the earthenware vessels becoming ritually unclean in a home infected with impure lesions. The question was raised, why couldn't these vessels simply be used when a person is ritually unclean, just like the ritually unclean food that can be eaten when the owner is ritually unclean?

The answer is that the food can be consumed totally and will not be wasted on account of its having contracted ritual impurity. The earthenware vessels, however, will lose some portion of their functionality because ritually impure vessels can only be used while their

owner is ritually impure. At all other times the earthenware vessels must remain "idle."

The Torah is revealing to us the extent to which we must value every opportunity to introduce the Divine into this world. We do not allow anything to be wantonly destroyed; that would violate a Biblical commandment known as *Bal Tashchis.* By the same token we may not allow our possessions to lose a portion of their functionality and opportunity to become part of the Divine palace.

The Jewish Home and Jewish Land: Models of G-d's Plan

We can now also understand why this lesson was taught in the context of the subject of the "impurity of the house" and entry of the Jewish people into the Land of Israel. The Jewish home is emblematic of G-d's desire to have a home in this world. By extension, the Land of Israel, the "Holy Land," is not just our homeland, it is G-d's Homeland; it is a physical land that is hospitable to and expressive of G-d's overt presence.

Thus, the Torah introduces the laws of lesions on homes as the People are about to enter the Land of Israel. It does so to forestall the potential for the inhabitants of the land to undermine G-d's natural home and thereby delay the fulfillment of G-d's Master Plan for the entire world.

To further underscore the importance of our mission to build G-d's home with integrity, the Torah exhorts us not to allow any component of our mission, no matter how insignificant, to go to waste. The earthenware, argubaly the most insignificant vessels in our homes, should not be allowed to become contaminated and their use restricted.

Radical?

Upon reflection it might seem that this approach will prove too radical for most people. For most it would suffice if they would limit themselves to following all of the explicit commandments in the Torah. Nowhere does the Torah state that one must focus on G-d's plan. One may therefore argue

that while we are compelled to do our part by doing one Mitzvah at a time, let G-d do the rest by putting all the pieces together to create His palace. We are not the Architects or Contractors, we are just the laborers.

The dispositive response to this argument is to concede that it may have had some merit when we were far away from the Messianic Age but no longer. In earlier historical periods, the focus was indeed on living day to day and contending with the struggles and challenges of life in exile. Perhaps only the truly and perfectly righteous people were able to see the larger picture.

However, times have changed. We are presently standing on the threshold of Redemption and nearing the completion of the Palace. Now, not only can the righteous focus on the Grand Plan, but, indeed, each and every one of us has the capacity and obligation to direct all of our energies towards realizing the goal.

Everyone a Tzadik!

Perhaps, this is **one** of the meanings of the Rebbe's statement that today we can all aspire to reach the level of *Tzadik*. If the Tzadik's principal focus is on fulfilling G-d's plan and agenda and, only secondarily, on his own, then that is eminently possible for us to do today as well because we are so close to the completion of the Divine Palace.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

ESSAY TWENTY-SIX

UNCOVERING THE TREASURES WITH SENSITIVITY

While Moshiach will liberate us from exile, he will not free us from our obligations to G-d and others.

To bring Moshiach we cannot compromise our dedication to every nuance of Torah.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

ESSAY TWENTY-SIX

UNCOVERING THE TREASURES WITH SENSITIVITY

Removing the Earthenware Vessels

One of the most enigmatic laws found in the Torah is "*Tzara'as Habyais*-house affliction." Similar to a skin lesion on a human body, discoloration of the house was a sign of ritual impurity and required examination by a Kohain-priest.

If the discoloration was "depressed, deep greens or deep reds and their appearance is lower than the wall" the Kohain would close the house off for seven days. If after seven days the affliction had spread the Kohain would have the affected stones removed, the area scraped and the impure stones replaced with new stones and mortar. If, the affliction continued to spread, the house would be declared entirely *tamei*-ritually unclean and demolished.

Now, before conducting the initial inspection of the house, the Torah requires the Kohain to order the removal of the house's contents to prevent them from becoming impure.

Rashi asks, what property was the Torah concerned about? Most utensils can be immersed in a Mikveh to become purified. Any contaminated food can be eaten when the person is in a ritually impure state. "What does the Torah want to save by removal from the house," Rashi asks, rhetorically? The answer is earthenware vessels which cannot be purified in a Mikveh; if affected they must be destroyed.

The Lesson

There is a powerful lesson we can derive from this law. Here we see the Torah's concern for the loss of earthenware utensils. How much more so we should show concern for the needs of other people? People frequently dismiss the needs of others by saying that those needs are trivial and unimportant. While they may be unimportant

to us they may be important to others and we must treat them accordingly.

This lesson is based on an understanding that someone else's needs – assuming they are not harmful, illegal, or immoral – are **our** obligations. Sure, we might want to educate others that their needs are not real, but that's when we put on our hat of parent, teacher or mentor. We can then try to educate others as to what are true and important needs and what they can dispense with. However, when we relate to another on a person-to-person basis, we must respect and even support the other's needs.

In the words of the Alter Rebbe: "Someone else's material needs are our spiritual needs."

A story is told of one prestigious rabbi known for his ascetic way of living, who hosted a child who wished for some delicacy, which was hard to procure. The rabbi spent many hours searching for this delicacy because it was important for another.

If we are entrusted with an article of almost no value we must still safeguard it as if it were a precious gem. Recognizing the value

differences of things is useful when we own the objects. We have every right to prioritize our own resources and possessions. We cannot, however, impose our priorities on others.

This approach is hinted at in the story of Yisro, Moses' father-in-law, who counseled Moses to delegate judicial authority to others to hear smaller cases and reserve his personal judicial role for the "big" cases. Although, in principle, G-d agreed with Yisro's proposal, He did so with one caveat. Instead of delegating the small cases to other judges and keeping the big ones for himself, G-d said Moses should delegate judicial authority for the **easy** cases and reserve the **difficult** ones for himself.

Commentators explain that the importance of a case should not be determined by the amount of money involved. It should make no difference whether the amount at stake is a penny or a million dollars. What determines the uniqueness of a case is its complexity. When dealing with someone else's money we have to treat every amount equally. Only the

owner has the right to decide the importance of his or her resources.

13 Foundations and 613 Stories Tall

We can apply this lesson to the realm of person-to-G-d obligations.

Judaism is based on 613 commandments and 13 principles of faith. The difference between the 13 principles of faith and the 613 commandments is that the former represent the foundation of Judaism while the latter provides its day-to-day structure. While destroying one of the 613 stories would diminish and harm the structure, it would still remain a building. However, if we were to remove the foundation the entire structure would collapse.

Now, if one were demolish one's own structure, we would distinguish between one of its stories and its foundation. However, when we are discussing the building owned by another, it makes no difference which part of the building is at risk of destruction. The entire structure—foundation and all of its stories—are equally sacrosanct and off limits.

We have as little right to destroy the 613th floor as we have to destroy the foundation.

This answers the apparent contradiction that exists with respect to the hierarchical importance of Mitzvos. In Ethics of the Fathers (Chapter 2:1) we are taught not to weigh the value of one Mitzvah against another. Yet in many other sources the Torah and our Sages speak of the stringent commandments and the less stringent commandments. Some commandments might appear to us as gems and others as simple earthenware.

When do we have the right to differentiate between Mitzvos by assigning greater importance to one than another? Are there times when we must treat all the Mitzvos as equal?

The answer is that when dealing with our subjective emotions, each Mitzvah can touch our souls in a different way. Some Mitzvos will have a more powerful effect on our minds, hearts and souls than others. Similarly, one Mitzvah will have an impact on the world in ways that other Mitzvos won't. For

example, the Talmud states that wearing Tefillin will command the fear and respect of other nations. It does not say that about other Mitzvos.

However, if we want to tamper with any Mitzvah, even the most "trivial" ones, it is as serious a breach as tampering with the most significant ones. The Mitzvos are G-d's domain and any attempt at undermining even the slightest iota of a Mitzvah is tantamount to destroying it in its entirety. A Mitzvah is an expression of G-d's will. His will for one Mitzvah is not different from His will for the others. While they differ in terms of their underlying rationale and the spiritual energy they generate, they are fundamentally all the expression of One Divine will; they form one complete and indivisible structure. Tampering with one Mitzvah is no different from tampering with all of them.

Discovering the Treasures

This lesson is even more relevant to us in the present day as we stand on the threshold of the Final Redemption. We can understand the

enhanced importance of this lesson today by referring to the reason for this strange phenomenon of afflicted houses.

Our Sages tell us that the reason houses in Israel were demolished when they exhibited signs of "affliction" was actually for the benefit of the Jewish people who conquered the Land of Canaanites. The Canaanites hid their treasures in the walls of their homes to keep them safe in the impending invasion by the Jews. G-d in his infinite kindness therefore created the phenomenon of afflicted houses so that the Jews would discover these treasures.

The Rebbe explains that this is also a metaphor for the hidden treasures in exile that will be revealed in the Messianic Age. Our mission now is to do everything in our power to demolish the structures of our exile to uncover their hidden treasures.

One might think that since we are involved in history's most important effort to bring Moshiach and the final Redemption, at which time all of the world's spiritual treasures will be revealed, that we may cut corners and skip

over the smaller details of Jewish law. Similarly, one might think that it may be a less serious infraction to trivialize someone else's needs or feelings in the pursuit of bringing Moshiach.

To dispel this misguided notion, the Torah tells us that before the Kohain can start the process of demolition of the home and discovery of the treasures, he must first guarantee that even the lowliest and most insignificant earthenware vessels will be removed to protect them from becoming contaminated and lost.

To bring Moshiach we must do it with utmost respect for the property and dignity of others. "Others" include other human beings and their property just as it involves our uncompromising relationship with G-d.

Moshiach and the Messianic Age are all about our total fidelity to the teachings of the Torah. In exile we are unable to keep most of the 613 commandments because of the loss of the Bais Hamikdash and other conditions of our diaspora. Moshiach's main objective will be to restore our ability to keep all of the

commandments with integrity. Each Mitzvah is an expression of G-d's will and observing each nuance of each Mitzvah we attach ourselves to Him and bring Him into our lives and throughout the world.

One cannot conflate Moshiach with compromising our respect for the integrity of G-d's commandments and the dignity of other people. Reinforcing our respect and sensitivity to others is the surest way to prepare ourselves for the world of Moshiach and to hasten his coming.

ESSAY TWENTY-SEVEN

THE THREE HAIRCUTS

There are powerful forces swirling around us today as a prelude to the ultimate Redemption.

Our challenge today is not a dearth of spirituality but our ability to safely and securely absorb these powerful forces.

LIGHT FROM THE FUTURE - PARSHAS TAZRIA-METZORA

ESSAY TWENTY-SEVEN

THE THREE HAIRCUTS

Metzora, Nazir and Levite

Three are the people whom the Torah requires to shave their hair:

A *Metzora* is one afflicted with a skin disorder that many have confused with leprosy. This condition renders him ritually unclean and he must be quarantined. When he has recovered from this "disease" the *Metzora* must go through a purification process that includes the shaving of his hair.

The second is a *Nazir,* one who had made a vow not to drink wine and cut one's hair. At the end of his term, or if he had become ritually unclean, the Torah commanded him to cut his hair.

The third example of shaving off one's hair applied to the Levites when they were initiated into their role as the priestly helpers

after the Mishkan, the portable Temple, was built in the desert. They too had to go through a hair-cutting procedure.

The King-Size Gimmel

All three categories that we enumerated are alluded to in this week's parsha. The Torah, when referring to their shaving of the Metzora, uses the word "*V'hisgalach* and he shall shave." The letter *gimmel* (which is also the number 3) in that word is written in a king-size form. This, commentators say, is an allusion to the three categories of people who must have their hair shaved.

What is the significance of having one's hair be shaved and why was this applied to specifically these three categories: *Metzora, Nazir* and Levite? What do these three individuals have in common?

The Role of the Levites

Of all Jews, the Levites were unique in their commitment to Judaism. All through Egyptian bondage and the sojourn in the desert the

Levites never succumbed to the temptation of assimilating. They were prepared to resist any attack against G-d with all means at their disposal. When the Jews got involved with the golden calf, all the Levites refused to participate. When Moses called on them to kill those who were actively involved in idol worship, they did so without hesitation.

And while the Kohain-Priest was also a man of G-d, there was a fundamental difference in their approach. The Kohain was identified with serving G-d with kindness and love. The Kohain's principle obligation today is to bless the Jewish community from time to time. Aaron was the Jewish people's greatest defender and lover. However, the Levites were the force of determination and military-like zeal to the cause of Judaism. Souls were on fire to serve G-d with passion and zeal.

The Spiritual Metzora

A Metzora, Kabbalah teaches us, was afflicted with this disease not because he was a lowly individual. On the contrary, it afflicted only the most spiritual individuals. When someone

generated too much spiritual energy and was not capable of integrating into his system because of some imperfection he possessed, it manifested itself in the appearance of a skin disorder. Much like the way the body will break out with a rash or other physical symptoms due to the body's need to resist an intruding element, similarly, a highly sensitive spiritual individual, will "break-out" when some "foreign" undesirable substance enters their system.

A *Nazir* is one who feels vulnerable to temptation. By becoming a *Nazir*, one is given extraordinary spiritual powers to deal with those pressures.

The Common Denominator

So, the common denominator in these three types, the Levite, *Metzora* and *Nazir* is that each in his own way possesses extraordinary spiritual energy that needs to be channeled properly to avoid a negative and occasionally a catastrophic result.

To illustrate: A person who is a zealot can very easily use his zealotry to harm innocent

people. The more spiritual one is the more harm some minor imperfection can become as can be seen with regard to a *Metzora*, who had to be quarantined to protect others from his impurity. And the *Nazir*, while assuming a heightened spiritual demeanor, has to be cautious lest he becomes arrogant and condescending.

Cutting off their hair was the Torah's way of curtailing their energy, not allowing it to go awry. It was the Torah's way of saying to these unique individuals: "You have been endowed with tremendous powers. Use it wisely. Don't let that it be diverted to other areas. Don't let it be contaminated by "foreign" influences and don't allow it to go to your head."

Beware of Heightened Spirituality

As we approach the Holiday of Passover, when we all experienced the great revelation of G-dliness at the time of the Exodus, it is important that we don't allow the heightened spirituality to harm us or others. We were thus commanded to eat Matzah and refrain

from eating or even possessing *Chametz* (leavened bread, dough that is allowed to rise), which symbolizes humility. We have to be humble and get away from anything that would pollute our souls as we rise to the greatest heights.

Climax of History: Choosing Gimmel

And as we approach the climax of history, the coming of Moshiach, we are given extraordinary resources as a prelude to what is to come.

The lesson of the *Metzora*, the Levites and *Nazir* is to know how to channel these resources properly.

In the Messianic Age, there will not be any impediment to our ability to absorb the most sublime G-dly light. The Talmud teaches us that "G-d will take the sun out of its sheath and the righteous will bask in it."

The challenge is now! In these last minutes of exile we have three choices. It may be suggested that the king-size gimmel which appears in this parsha stands for these three

approaches.

We can either generate powerful spiritual energy but not have the capability of absorbing and integrating it into our system, as the Metzora who breaks out with a skin disorder.

Or we can generate a limited and modulated form of spiritual energy that we can easily incorporate into our finite capacity.

The third option is to generate powerful light and find the means to assimilate it into our consciousness. This gimmel-third approach is the dynamic of the period of Geulah, another word that begins with a gimmel.

Let's choose gimmel and usher in the ultimate period of integrated Divine light.